This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

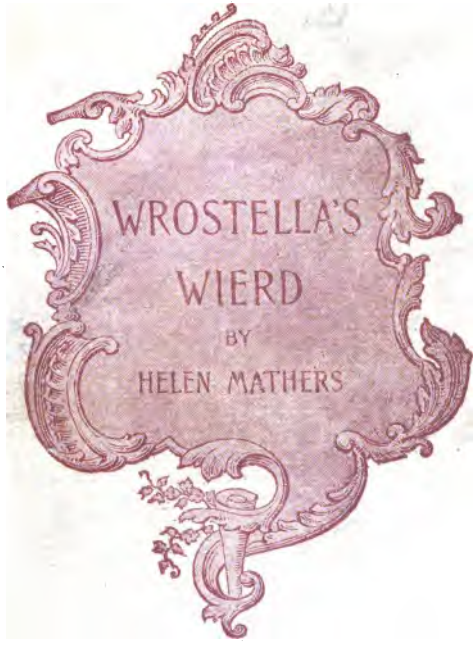
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

New

Trees

SHANDON SERIES.



NEW YORK
TAIT, SONS & COMPANY,
31 UNION SQUARE, NORTH

WROSTELLA'S WEIRD

WROSTELLA'S WEIRD

BY

HELEN MATHERS

AUTHOR OF

"T'OTHER DEAR CHARMER," "HEDRI," "MYSTERY OF NO. 13,"
"COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," ETC.

H. B. (Mrs.) Reeves.

NEW YORK
TAIT, SONS & COMPANY
UNION SQUARE
c 1892
60

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
133214B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1941 L

COPYRIGHT, 1892
BY
JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

TROW DIRECTORY
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY
NEW YORK

INTRODUCTION.

THE many wax-lights on the broad toilet-table shed their soft brightness upon the silver-framed mirror and the shining backs of brushes, pin-holders, and jewel-cases, on the unguents, essences, powders, and pomades, in gold and silver boxes, and the whole paraphernalia, in short, of an old beauty instead of the young fresh one, who sat in a big elbow-chair and talked to her own reflection in the glass for company. Behind her stretched a vast, gloomy room with catafalque-like bedstead, heavy furniture, and walls so darkly panelled that they appeared almost black when the fitful gleam of the fire (sunk deep in the wall) touched them;

WROSTELLA'S WEIRD

had not learned to shoot, yes, just like a man, I should not dare to lie down in my bed."

She shifted her face a little to glance down at something lying among the litter of gold and silver toys — something plain and workmanlike, whose steel barrel shone brightly.

"Suzette will have it that we shall be robbed and murdered one night," she went on musingly; "she says 'there are secret passages in the house, known to the peasants, and any one can get in who likes.' Alphonse locks his door — the poor, fat fellow is a coward; and, perhaps M. Laurent does the same. Heigho! I shall be glad when Terry comes back. There will be only one month more, and then Paris — and love — not the weariness of pretending to love when one is tired."

The provoking little face in the glass gave her back smile for smile, wickedness for wickedness; and one might surmise that, anx-

ious as she might be to see her lord, she would lead him a pretty dance before he caught her.

"After all," she said, "I am glad that he went away. It's a mistake to think that appetite comes with eating. You must be hungry — really hungry — to want a thing very much, yes, and to enjoy it when you get it. No doubt he thought I should sit down and cry, or tear my hair, or set off across the bog in pursuit of him; but I have done none of these things, except cry with pure rage."

She laughed, the rings of silky black hair on her forehead shading her dark eyes as she leaned forward; and, in the same moment, she saw something move in the darkness and shadow of the great room, and, straining her sight as into a well of darkness, made out the figure of a man, and knew that it was moving slowly towards her.

Terror seized her — a mad, unreasoning

panic dizzied her brain. Here was a murderer, one of those brutish creatures who hated her, and against whom she had been warned even while she mocked them, and it must be his life or hers. In a breath she snatched the pistol from the table, pointed the muzzle over her shoulder, and with wild eyes fixed upon the glass — fired.

A strangled cry, a groan, and all was still. She could not see at first for the mist as of blood before her eyes. When it cleared, the vision had faded like a breath that, but for the moment, had dimmed the mirror, which now gave back the semi-darkness of the vast and dreary room.

She wanted to turn, to look, to see the possible fruits of her handiwork; but she had no power to do anything but sit stupidly staring into the mirror, first at nothing, then at herself, who, in one moment of time, had become a criminal, a murderess.

The pistol had fallen on the table. Mechanically she began presently to rub her little hands one against the other, looking at them furtively, as if expecting to see bloodstains upon them. What was going on in the darkness behind her? Had the wounded man dragged himself away by the secret way that he had come, or was he bleeding silently to death, or even already dead?

The stupor of horror had slowly passed, and presently she got up, and groped her way backwards, a young, slight shape, nearly lost in its white draperies, back and back till she came at last to the wall, against which she leaned with outstretched arms, and all the soft skin of her face dulled to a sick pallor, out of which her eyes looked blank and expressionless as a week-old babe's. The sad-colored carpet stretched unbroken by any strange object before her. The door was shut,

the room empty of any save herself, and silent as the grave.

Her glance travelled vacantly over the panelled walls, then downward again in search to the floor. Presently, moving like a wavering, unsteady light that is blown hither and thither by the wind, she traversed the room, and, taking a candle from the table, knelt down with it, pressing one hand to and fro restlessly, seeking that which she, shudderingly, feared to find.

From knee to knee she groped, sweeping each inch of carpet with her palm, until she had advanced to almost the centre of the apartment, and still there was nothing — nothing — and the trembling hope was beginning to stir in her that perchance a too lively imagination had conjured up the eyes in the glass, when suddenly she felt her hand wet and sticky, and, holding it up, saw that it was red with blood.

A groan broke from her lips. It was true then — and she had slain a man; but who, *who?* If he could come and go unseen, might he not be somewhere near her now?

"Terry," she said in a whisper, "why did you go away from me? Why did you bring me here? But learning to shoot was my fault, and if I had not learned, I should not — have — done — this. Perhaps they will hang me, and then you will be sorry that you got tired of me, and went away angry — and stayed away so long. And I will confess to no one but you what I have done — not to Suzette, who would scream and faint; not to M. Laurent; — how could I bear to let him know I was so wicked? — nor to my father, who hated my marriage, and Wrostella — and so, if no one comes to take me away, Terry, I will bear it alone until you come."

She looked no more than a child as she knelt there, gazing at the stain on her hand;

but she had a woman's courage, too, for presently she rose, fetched cloths from a press, and set to work on the tiny pool of blood until all traces were removed and the dark, heavy pile looked as before.

Daylight found her kneeling still, but asleep, with arms outstretched as if to clasp the feet of the ivory Christ that hung on the wall above her bed.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh! better ye'd stay at hame, Helen,
And sew your silken seam;
For my house is in the far Hielands,
And ye'll hae puir welcome hame."

WROSTELLA CASTLE, turning its sullen shoulders on the black bog-land that stretches in a broad slope from the seashore to the range of mountains that goes by the name of the Irish Highlands, had been built, apparently, by some madman or misanthrope who intended to be well housed when he selected this dreariest, most God-forsaken spot in the whole island upon which to dwell.

Looking out from its windows, heavily and strongly built, as if to defy time, you could

see nothing but the broad Atlantic, and the so-called settlements, many of them not more than eight to ten feet wide, that lie thickly scattered by the shore and on the promontories that jut out into the sea. All have been reclaimed from the wild bog-land by generations of toilers; but, toil as they may, the peasants are always poor, nearly always hungry, and life to them means but one long, tenacious struggle with death, so hopelessly barren is the ground, so few are the resources that, in this instance, nature in step-motherly mood has provided them with.

They do not complain; theirs is the apathy of despair, that expects and hopes nothing; you cannot withdraw light from the lens in which no light has come, and not being used to help of any kind, or to do other than starve when their miserable crops of potatoes and oats failed, they did not murmur when from the fortress-like dwelling erected in their

midst came neither money, nor food, nor kindness, nor any one of those little favors that it is surely the rich man's highest luxury to afford to the poor man at his gates.

One wild winter's day Stephen Fitzgerald, travelling over a hundred miles from the nearest railway station in a jolting, open car, had alighted, and standing in the midst of the desolate waste, decided that here, indeed, was a place where neither friend nor enemy would care to follow him, and partly out of the bogwood, partly with materials brought from a great distance, Wrostella was reared and furnished, and with some old servants, as sour of visage as himself, its master entered in, and dwelled there until he died.

Even if the castle had wished to buy, the starving peasants had nothing to sell; and for such things as might not be stored the bogland was traversed once or twice a week by the cross old man who ruled the kitchen, and

was in turn ruled by Mr. Fitzgerald, who lived entirely among his books, save when he took long walks by the seashore, or for distraction visited the shooting-gallery, which was the only unusual feature in the otherwise commonplace house. Here, with every modern appliance around him to test his skill, he would practise for hours, but what pleasure he found in his great proficiency it would be hard to say, unless, indeed, he expected an opportunity for testing it that never came.

What was the secret of his life? What had soured and driven him out from his kind to a solitary existence from which all the sweet use of life had been extracted?

Even his own family did not know; but one of them, having successfully tracked him to the desert, retired shuddering, and Stephen Fitzgerald was troubled by visitors no more.

With all his callousness to his fellow-crea-

tures, he was a just man, and his relations believed themselves secure of the very considerable fortune he had it in his power to leave; but when he died—of an accident in his shooting-gallery it was charitably said, though others gave it a harsher name,—it was found that he had affixed a curious condition to the inheritance of the property; viz., that his heir should live for four consecutive months out of each year at Wrostella. If he refused to do this (or his frivolous wife for him, which was highly probable), the next heir should inherit; and if he, too, refused the condition attached, then the next, until all Stephen's desirable kin had been gone through till only the very poorest remained.

His heir *did* refuse. He was a rich man, and able to throw up two thousand a year rather than cross his wife.

The next in succession being extravagant, and therefore needy, came over to Wrostella,

shuddered, groaned, but decided that with the aid of a few choice companions, French novels, French brandy, and a good cook, he might survive the ordeal, so accepted the heirship; but before entering upon it, he went to Paris. Here, in his anxiety to take a good fill of pleasure before his enforced fast, he overdid the pleasure — and died.

Terrence came next on the list — Terry, who had only a capful of sunny curls, a pair of Irish blue eyes, an Irish wit, an Irishman's warm heart, and a voice and way that made all the women love him almost before they had looked at him! Money he had none, or, perhaps, five and twenty would not have found him unmarried still; but he did not happen to be wanting to marry any one very particularly when, after attending his cousin's funeral at Paris, he found himself the next heir, and immediately after — met Noemie.

A Creole, born in the South and reared in the lap of Paris, with a father rich beyond the dreams of avarice, Noemie was lovely, spoiled, petulant, and the most charming little person possible, being far too dangerous to the peace of any man who saw her to be the very least in danger herself.

M. Richepin found her lovers a constant embarrassment, and at last, following the French fashion, selected a husband whom he considered in every way suitable to her, and duly presented him for the young lady's inspection.

He was a Frenchman, young, rich, handsome, and romantic; moreover, he had the reputation of being extremely successful with the fair sex, and Noemie's heart throbbed a little — not much — at his impassioned and practised love-making, and was indeed weighing him in the balance, when her father brought young Terrence Fitzgerald

home to dinner, and M. Laurent's chance was lost.

Noemie's father cursed himself for a fool, when into the girl's

> "dark eyes' splendor,
> Where the warm light loves to dwell,"

came a light that only the young Irishman had known how to bring there — an Irishman with nothing to offer but a miserable castle in the middle of a bog, and a paltry two thousand a year, on which to keep a young woman steeped to the very lips in the luxuries and refinements of Paris!

It was not Terry who ventured to make any such outrageous proposal to her father, but Noemie herself who calmly informed M. Richepin that she loved Terry, that Terry loved her, and that if she were not allowed to marry him she would die.

Noemie's father laughed, and told her to

begin the dying business at once, which she promptly did by refusing to eat; and meanwhile Terry was forbidden the house, and M. Laurent was invited every day in his stead.

M. Laurent came with alacrity, for he passionately loved the girl, quite apart from her money, and did not believe in her having more than an ephemeral fancy for Terry — what woman could with himself in the field?

When he kissed her hand, she promptly boxed his ears; when he tried his well-known and usually effective style of love-making, she laughed in his face, and, indeed, bade fair to extinguish his very real passion by making him look ridiculous, — a dangerous experiment at any time with so vain a creature as man. And a Frenchman's vanity is even a more delicate plant than an Englishman's, and, when wounded, bleeds

much longer than his heart; and M. Laurent, for all his love, never forgave Noemie, and might even pay her out some day if he ever got the chance. And, meanwhile, she dwindled, faded, stifling the pangs of hunger with strenuous determination, and defying her father's mingled commands and entreaties, until, when from pure exhaustion, she could no longer leave her bed, M. Richepin gave up the unequal contest, and furiously told her to send for her Terry to take her away to his Irish bog, when she would die in real earnest of *ennui* in a week.

She did send for him. He, too, had suffered considerably, seeing no prospect of overcoming her father's opposition; but love lit such warm fires in their eyes, and the shelter of each other's arms was so sweet, that the prospect of four months alone together in the wilderness sent Noemie into ecstasies; and if he shook his head, and said

she would find him but a dull fellow for sole company, she did not believe him, and was quite prepared to take the risk. Four months' exile out of each year in the wilderness, and an extremely limited income all the year round, did not, in the least, cool their transports, and in due course the formal betrothal took place.

M. Laurent swallowed his disappointment and attended it, looking indeed so handsome and manly, that had Noemie not been blinded by love, she must have seen that he made even Terry compare unfavorably with him, while M. Richepin angrily shrugged his shoulders, feeling quite convinced that before many months were over she would be bitterly repenting her bargain. He knew his daughter's tastes better than she knew them herself, as fathers indeed often do know the characters of the children whom they have reared with the utmost devotion, only to be forsaken

for the first wandering fancy that crosses their paths.

And his heart was full of bitterness when, a month later, he saw the untried girl set out with such blithe gladness for the distant home that he had never seen, with a man of whom he knew nothing save that he bore an honorable name, and had a charming appearance and manner — and very little else besides — or so thought M. Richepin.

Perhaps Noemie realized at parting what all his years of care and devotion had done for her, and all as it were for the reaping of a stranger, and she clung round his neck long and closely, promising to come back soon; "for," said she, "these four months will pass like a day, father, both to you and to me!"

He sighed as he gave the girl back to her husband, pitying her for her youthful haste and ignorance; but it was something more than a fancy that Noemie took with her to

Wrostella, packed in among her *bibelots* and laces, her jewels, and girlish vanities: it was a very true and tender heart that did not change easily, and that was, moreover, good to the very core.

Even the hundred and thirty miles' jolt across country, all traces of civilization rapidly disappearing, and pleasant green fields but a memory, save for an occasional patch by some lonely lake, could not daunt their happiness; nor when they descended from the lofty mountains to ugly, squat Wrostella did their spirits sink, though the gloomy darkness of the house and the forbidding looks of the old servants might have chilled less love-warm hearts than hers and his.

They brought into the place a burst of life and sunshine; and the French cook and maid who followed them, being in the initial stages of courtship, also contributed their own stock of gayety, refusing to be influenced by the

funereal surroundings, or the scowls of the "images," as they irreverently termed the custodians of the castle. The maid and the man even approved of the wild Atlantic, and went to walk on its shores, picking their steps delicately over the miserable cabins that could scarcely be distinguished from the huge bowlders that cumbered the ground, and in French fashion, shrugging their shoulders at the squalor, which seemed as natural to these poor people as did all the comforts of life to them.

But Alphonse, though in love, had no idea of supporting the tender passion without sublime cooking of every description; and one of the most intelligent of the peasants spent the major part of his existence in fetching from Londonderry the necessary ingredients for those dinners which were served up at Wrostella as faultlessly as if for a dinner-party in the Champs Élysées.

M. Richepin had lent the man, with a year's princely wages, to the young people for the time they would be at Wrostella, "because," said he, "only the most excellent cooking will enable you two young folks to support existence entirely alone for four whole months, and when the usual monotony of love sets in, you will always be able to find distraction in Alphonse's inspirations, for lovers always say the same thing, but cooks are sometimes—different."

He had also asked leave to provide the young people's establishment with all they required during the period they were in Ireland, and he had given Alphonse *carte blanche* for all expenses.

"It was all he could do for his daughter's happiness," he said to himself cynically, and he had done it. If anything on earth could prolong the season of love for two young people shut up for a month in a desert, it would

be the genius of an inspired cook, and they had got him.

He would not have gone, this chevalier of the stew-pans, had not beauty drawn him "with a single hair," and that hair growing on the dark head of Noemie's delightfully pretty French maid, Suzette.

He had fallen in love with her at first sight, but his opportunities of seeing her in the Champs Élysées mansion were few, so that when M. Richepin, fully expecting a refusal, laid his commands on the *chef* to accompany the young pair, he was amazed at the cordiality of the man's consent.

M. Alphonse, having a very good idea of what Wrostella would be, felt that out of sheer *ennui*, Suzette would be obliged to smile on him; and Suzette did.

The grim old servants, scandalized at the French sprightliness, airs, and ways of the

smart pair below stairs, glowered, hovered awhile in the darkness, and fled.

They were replaced by cheerful, buxom young maids and stalwart serving-men from Londonderry, who bore the appalling dulness for a longer or shorter period that varied with the charms of their fellow-servants; still, in one way or another, the service of the house was suitably conducted, and, in addition to the French servants, Tim, an old adherent of Terry's, an intense hater of women, remained from first to last through the many changes in the servants' hall. And outside, the peasants, who had received and expected nothing from the former Fitzgerald, looked for as little from the newcomers, of whose doings indeed they knew nothing and cared less, being ignorant, even beyond the comprehension of what luxury meant; for to rightly appreciate anything one must be cognizant of its true value, and these people had

never learned the value of anything, not even money, which they never touch, save when, by the sale of stock, fed on the rough mountain pastures, they scrape together sufficient for the rent of their lands and pay it over to their landlord.

The sea was alive with fish, and they had but one boat between them. If their scanty crops of potatoes and oats failed, then so much the worse for them. The Atlantic was before, the bog behind, and the pitiless sky above them. Help from man! there was none. They were not to know that in the future a noble-hearted Englishwoman was to come to their assistance, giving her time, brains, and money, to help them to bring light into their heathenish ignorance of all domestic arts, and slowly and painfully teach them such industries as enabled them to earn money enough to live in comfort and self-respect, and, in a word, to raise them from all-

fours to upstanding, intelligent men and women, who, happy in their honorable toil, this day verily rise up and call her blessed.

But, as yet, no such gracious figure had loomed on the horizon of these poor people from whom Terry rigorously kept his wife apart, having no wish to see her young brightness dimmed and her spirit saddened by their hopeless poverty — so hopeless, indeed, that only a rich man might successfully cope with it, and only then by devoting his whole time, as well as a fortune, to the task. And Terry had but one life to live, and in those days he was selfish in his new-found happiness, and so long as he kept her happy, considered the first duty of his life performed.

And Noemie was ignorant too — ignorant of the harsher side of life, as but few French, and no English, women are; and these strange people who never begged, never by word or sign acknowledged her presence when she

passed them, appealed to her sympathy no more than if they had been cabbages, and it is almost a rule with selfish youth never to offer what is neither directly nor indirectly asked for.

So Noemie never saw the inside of these miserable hovels, and, indeed, would have been afraid to venture into one of them alone, for Terry (and this was wrong of him) encouraged her to think that every peasant was a Fenian in disguise, and their apathy seemed to her sullenness, and the fact that they possessed no firearms did not deter her from drawing living mental pictures of them as masked assassins appearing at her bedside in the dead of night, intent either upon her life, or the jewels that would enable them to launch a whole fleet of fishing-boats upon the unfished sea.

Suzette shared in her mistress's feeling, so lowering were the glances cast upon her

frivolous self and Alphonse in their walks abroad — glances that were not even appeased by the gracious permission he afforded the peasants to come up to the castle for such food as overflowed its inmates' needs. Alas! their wants were too colossal to be satisfied by broken bread, and all along the seaboard, covering an area of nearly one thousand square miles, the same utter destitution prevailed. Indeed, it was just as well that Noemie did not know, and that they made her afraid instead of miserable, so afraid, indeed, that she took to studying ardently the art of self-defence, and passed long days in the shooting-gallery with Terry, and the story of which she also did not know, or probably nothing would have induced her to set foot inside the door.

Every modern device that could encourage skill in a marksman was there, as well as every arm or instrument of warfare now used

in any part of the globe. But it was in pistol-shot practice that Noemie delighted, and in which she at last became even more proficient than her husband. And he, only too eager to invent or discover new methods of passing time, was perfectly happy to attend and applaud her, so that soon the one quaintly rich apartment in the hideous house became the one they habitually occupied. And Suzette rubbed her little plump hands, and told Alphonse that *now* Madame's jewels would be safe, if by chance Mr. Fitzgerald should be called away — as husbands occasionally are from their wives, especially in such a place as Wrostella — Madame was well able to defend herself.

And Terry, watching his wife as she shattered to atoms a swaying glass ball, at which, with the aid of a mirror, she aimed over her shoulder, thought so too, and confessed himself fairly beaten out of the field.

CHAPTER II.

"O dinna ye see yon castle, Helen,
That shines soe fair to see?
There is a lady in it, Helen,
Will sinder you and me."

LOVE and kisses (apt to become monotonous if extended over too long a period and always with the same person) carried the young people triumphantly over the first month's enforced sojourn in the wilderness; shooting, and M. Alphonse over the next; but with the third came to Noemie that intense *nostalgia* known only to true Parisians who have been born, as it were, on the Boulevards, have lived on them, and, as nearly as possible, die on them, for no other place seems so good to them under heaven.

And Noemie, looking out at the wild win-

try weather and the storm-lashed sea, longed for the life, the beauty, the movement of the great city, for the flowers, the cheerful voices, the *gaieté de cœur* with which Paris infects all her inhabitants; for the drives in the Bois that she had once valued so lightly; for the new fashions that would make her present attire *de mode;* for the evening papers that she had taken as a matter of course, but now so sorely missed; for all the shifting, brilliant panorama — in short, of the life to which she had become habituated. And last, but by no means least, she missed very greatly the father whom she had loved better than anything in the world before Terry came — Terry who had possessed all the charms of the unknown, and who now stood confessed in all the faults of an intimate friend. For if Stephen Fitzgerald's hatred of his kind could have suggested one method of vengeance upon it more fiendish than another, it would have

been the throwing of a young man and woman, almost entire strangers to each other, absolutely on one another's society without a single extraneous source of enjoyment, for months; and if his spirit walked, as it was popularly supposed to do, it must have been thoroughly happy in observing the signs of weariness that gradually crept over the pair.

A man can't change his nature because he has accidentally got married, and Terry loved an out-door life, and excelled in hunting, shooting, fishing, and other manly exercises usually affected by persons whose muscles are in an exact inverse ratio to the quantity and quality of their brains.

He adored Noemie; but it is one thing to want a morsel of bread, and another to see loaves ranged in endless perspective on shelves, all waiting to be eaten; and the very kindest thing a friend could have done would be to

separate this young pair for a considerable time, until a real hunger for the sight of each other's faces should overtake them.

To be sure, they had plenty of books, papers, and music, and the immortal Alphonse took good care that a considerable part of their time should be devoted to the consideration of those masterpieces into which he threw his whole soul, yet even *his* heart at times failed him, for he and Suzette, though having the immense advantage over their master and mistress that they were not married, had reached the point of almost yawning in each other's faces; and the *soubrette*, after the fashion of maids of all nationalities, contrived in various ways to make Noemie uncomfortable, and more and more dissatisfied with her dismal surroundings.

It would have been the height of folly to transport French furniture and French surroundings across a hundred or more miles of

bog, but Suzette groaned over their absence all the same, and looked and felt as thoroughly out of her element as a dainty drawing-room cat who is suddenly lodged in an empty barn.

She found time to discover several gray hairs in Alphonse's head, and some serious defects in his temper; and if there had been a man in the place worthy of a glance from her soft, black eyes he would have got it. In one respect her mistress was better off than she, for there was the shooting-gallery; but, alas! Noemie had learned all there was to learn in it, and the two young people sought in vain to hide from each other the dulness that threatened to consume their love, and the restiveness which daily and hourly enforced companionship must inevitably develop in even the most loving and faithful souls.

Perhaps the fault lay most with Noemie; for a woman never forgets that marriage is a

chain, with herself at one end and a man at the other, and when she places the man she loves under a microscope (as a man, indeed, very seldom puts a woman), it is not often to his advantage or her own peace of mind that she does so.

And Noemie expected too much, and was disappointed to find that her idol was not made of pure gold at all, but ordinary clay, though, as he had never pretended to be anything else, this was unreasonable on her part, — and womanly. Gradually, in her mind, he took color from his surroundings, which were hard, gray, and full of a great discordancy to this true child of the South, whose life had been so full of warmth, and color, and movement until now.

Possibly her father had understood this spoiled product of civilization better than she had understood herself; or, rather, he knew very little of the depths of her heart, and a

great deal of the power that the mere force of habit had over her, and bleak Wrostella, with its moaning seaboard, had seemed to him the very last place in which to face the disillusioning process of the first few months of married life.

Gradually it became borne in upon Terry's mind — and like most men of the better sort, he was naturally unsuspicious — that she was aware of having made a huge mistake, that she regretted it, and that after all M. Laurent would have been a much more suitable husband for her than himself.

And once that idea got firmly lodged in Terry's hot head — and he was not an Irishman for nothing — it was very hard to get it out again, and being by no means disillusioned of Noemie, but only a little tired, after the fashion of men, he became suspicious, and in due proportion disagreeable, so that soon the "ruder words rushed in" compared with

which their passing discontent had been as Paradise.

Noemie's bloom had begun to fade, the place was telling on her physically, and her temper — as passionate a one as Terry's own — suffered in consequence, so that both were in the mood when the merest spark would cause an explosion, when that spark came.

One day Terry received at breakfast a letter in the handwriting of a lady that disturbed him mightily, and the contents of which he did not communicate to his wife.

"I must leave you," he said abruptly, as he rose from table, then rang, and gave orders that the car should be prepared at once, and a small portmanteau put ready.

"Where are you going?" said Noemie, coldly.

"I am going on business, and may be three days absent — or more. My uncle's will only

insists on my making a residence of this place for four months; it does not forbid my leaving it for a short time on an emergency."

"If that is so, why could you not have broken the monotony by taking me away for a few days?" she said wearily.

"Have you found it so terrible?" he said, turning to look at her keenly, and Terry's blue eyes could be very keen sometimes, and even hard.

"I have found it dull," she said with a glance that cut him to the quick.

"And you would not have been dull with Laurent?" he said calmly.

"No."

"And Wrostella is not Paris?"

"No, alas!"

"And you wish you had never come?"

"Yes; and I wish — I wish that you and your Wrostella were at the bottom of the

sea before I had ever seen either of you!" cried Noemie, beside herself at his abrupt departure, his silence as to why he went, and the strangeness of his manner towards her.

"Do you mean that?" he said, turning upon her a face so strangely altered that she scarcely knew it.

Her heart cried out "No! no!" In that moment all her weariness of his company had vanished, and she loved him as passionately as ever; but she was spoiled, and her proud Southern blood burned hot in her, and she said deliberately, "Yes."

He came nearer and looked at her — at the young, alluring beauty that had made him her slave, and said, roughly, —

"You wish that you had married M. Laurent?"

"I do," she said, clinching her hands hard

that she might not break down and fall upon his neck with tears and kisses.

"You may be able to do so yet," he said, then went swiftly away, and in another minute had left the house.

CHAPTER III.

"O fause are the vows o' womankind,
But fair is their fause bodie;
I ne'er wad hae trodden on Irish ground
Had it no been for love o' thee."

It came jolting and bumping round the steep shoulder of the hill, so far away yet that the two figures it contained looked like black dots, with no difference even between their size; yet Noemie danced for joy in her watch-tower as the car made its slow and roundabout descent, and long before the mere outlines of the two occupants had become visible, had recognized one as Terry and the other as the man whom M. Alphonse regarded as his sworn vassal, and ordered about accordingly.

"If you only knew," said Noemie, addressing the distant object, "what an *excellent*

thing absence is for making the heart grow fonder, you would have stayed away longer than two days — for if I love you so much this morning, whatever state should I be in if you stayed away a week? And you should never, *never* be inconveniently fond of a man. 'Be perfectly sweet to him — make him adore you — and then treat him like dirt.' That was Lucille's advice to me when I married, but it's going too far. And I like to like him on my own account — quite as much as to feel he likes me. There's a lot more pleasure in giving than receiving, only it's a pleasure you must deny yourself, with a husband."

Noemie was talking nonsense, and she knew it; but she was in that joyous mood when fooling is the most delightful and natural thing in the world, so she went on dancing, and peeping, and fooling round the little ugly, circular tower which was the crowning hideousness of Wrostella.

"I can almost see his face now, and I feel, yes, I am sure, he has made himself very smart. What will he say to me — what shall I say to him? Of course he will beg my pardon. Then I shall beg his. It's so easy, when someone has done so first! And I'll tell him I have been as lively as a grig (I wonder what a grig is?) all the time, and he shall *never* know what an awful turning over and over feeling I had when he drove away — but I didn't cry. I can tell him *that*, — not till next day. And if you don't do a thing just when you're expected to do it, it doesn't count. What is that he has in his hand? *Flowers!* O lovely! Dear — dear boy! He will hold them up for me to smell, and then, well, I suppose there'll be a kiss, only one. Then he'll want more. And then — ah-ah! Monsieur Terry, there will be some fun. How is my frock? One of my prettiest. Trust your frock more than your smile where a man is

concerned. What a lot of parcels he has got! I can see them sticking out of the car everywhere. Men are timid creatures after all — a woman never brings a gift in her hand when she wants to make a quarrel up with her sweetheart — And he has a new hat on — I can scarcely see his face — extravagant boy! Shall I stay up here or go down to meet him? Neither; I'll let him find me half-way. Say, behind the door in the shooting-gallery — only that would not be dignified."

She ran singing down the stairs, meeting her husband's body-servant, Tim, at the bottom. The young man stood aside, not looking at her, as he pulled a forelock. But she was so happy that she felt she must pass some of her joy on to even this sullen young man who hated his master's marriage, so she said, "Mr. Fitzgerald will be here in a moment; the car is descending the hill."

The man's face flushed with delight; mur-

muring something inarticulate, he hurried down to the front door. Noemie passed on to the shooting-gallery and went in.

There was a glass over the fireplace, heavily flanked with arms, and Noemie set a chair before it and climbed up to take an all-round survey of her person, which looked curiously young and fresh in its barbaric setting, and made up her mind that rose was decidedly the color to wear when anything relating to love was in question, and you wanted your war-paint fresh.

The noise of an arrival at the front door came faintly to her ears as she jumped down, then the sound of men's voices approaching, and then she blushed, and felt her courage forsaking her; worse, it was all she could do to keep from running to the door to meet her lord, — and she could not afford to give herself away like that, — so she turned her back to the door and walked away.

The steps came nearer, crossed the threshold; she heard a slight ejaculation, then some one came with rapid steps up the long room, and she smelt easily the delicious violets and lilies he was carrying; and she gave a little sniff of appreciation, and the dimples in her young cheeks stole out, brimful of mischief and love.

"Madame!"

The voice mingled with the breath of the flowers, destroying their sweetness, and with a feeling that the day had suddenly grown dark, Noemie turned to face her visitor.

"Monsieur!"

Her voice was so toneless, her face expressed such bitter disappointment, that M. Laurent fell back a step, the eager light dying out of his eyes, a deep mortification taking its place.

"Pardon, Madame," he said gravely, and

his tones were as cold as hers; "but M. Richepin intrusted me with some letters and other commissions for you, and, being in the neighborhood, I have come to deliver them in person."

In the neighborhood! To jolt a hundred and forty miles over a bog to pay an afternoon call — the idea brought back Noemie's dimples, and she held out her hand with a hospitable smile.

"It was very kind of you," she said, "and you must be frozen, and aching. Will you not come down-stairs and have some refreshment?"

"I would rather stay here awhile, if I may," he said, looking round. "What a wonderful room! And I see you use it constantly," he said, stooping to pick up a reel of cotton from the ground.

He still held the great bunch of flowers, not awkwardly, on the contrary, with as

easy an air as if a bouquet was as usual a thing for a man to carry as his hat.

Noemie smiled, insensibly soothed, and feeling herself once more in touch with Paris — and civilization.

"In what part of the neighborhood are you staying?" she said presently, when they were sitting down, and her knees were covered with the sweet-scented mass, into which she continually dipped her face for delight.

"At Londonderry. I have friends there." He paused and put his hand to his side, as if in sudden pain.

"What is it?" cried Noemie, alarmed.

"A sharp pain, like a knife in the chest," he said, straightening himself up with difficulty. "Probably I have caught cold; it is a bitter day, and I fear I was not sufficiently wrapped up for so long a drive."

"It is indeed a long drive," said Noemie

remorsefully, "and in an open car too! You must have something hot at once, and then Alphonse shall get you something to eat."

"You have Alphonse?" he said, as he followed her out. "You are fortunate."

But his voice was tired; and he paused once or twice going down-stairs, as if breath had failed him. Through the hall window showed the leaden, wind-whitened sea, and already the short winter afternoon was drawing on towards dusk, so that the outlook was even drearier than usual.

M. Laurent shivered as he glanced out in passing, as if even his own splendid vitality were impaired by the desolate spot; and he looked with pity at the young slight shape, its arms full of flowers, that flitted ahead of him.

"What a setting for such a jewel!" he said to himself, casting an angry, contempt-

uous thought to the man who had given it her, and for whom indeed he presently inquired.

"Mr. Fitzgerald is away for a few days," she said, turning her back that M. Laurent might not see the color in her face, "on business."

M. Laurent expressed sorrow at not seeing his successful rival, and studied Noemie closely while he drank his hot brandy and water, but made as little of her as it is always possible to make when a woman gives her mind to baffling you.

He admired the *aplomb* with which she had accepted an embarrassing situation, not that it embarrassed *him* at all; indeed, it was a perfectly natural thing — and so French — that a married couple should quarrel and part, and accept consolation elsewhere.

Nearly all women made mistakes in their husbands (M. Laurent shrewdly opined that

his own wife, when he got her, would make as big a mistake as any), and they all got over it, and were polite and cold and friendly to each other afterwards; that is to say, if they had any breeding about them.

And there was plenty of breeding, and pluck too, about this young wife who bore her husband's absence with such nonchalant grace, but had yet grown so pale under neglect, but who was more tempting, more adorable, than ever.

"She says too little," he mused. "A woman in love always says too much."

"How is my father?" Noemie inquired eagerly.

"He is well, but lonely. I have a quantity of things for you, and he knows your tastes so well!"

"Yes — indeed." And Noemie's eyes filled suddenly with smarting tears for the dear old dad who had never denied her anything

— except the right to make herself miserable, and he had given her even that at last.

"Tell me all about him," she said in a low voice; and M. Laurent, in his well-bred, delightful voice, told her only things that were charming, — of how her father was counting the days to her return; of how he was preparing certain surprises for her; of how all her friends missed her; and how delightful it would be for all concerned when Paris had become her home again.

She listened to him, enchanted, at one with him in taste and feeling, realizing, too, with a vividness she had never done before, the charm of his appearance and manner, and admiring the cut of his clothes, and the way he wore them, from the very bottom of her feminine soul.

Terry must have a better tailor, Terry must.

He rose reluctantly at last, their talk but

half done; and then she remembered that this was Wrostella, not that "fane of lightness," the Hotel Richepin, but a stone's throw from his own beautiful house.

"But," she exclaimed, when he began his adieus, "you cannot get back to Londonderry to-night! You would be lost in the bog. To-morrow perhaps —"

M. Laurent was willing to face the bog, feeling it indeed easier to do so than remain a night without dressing-bag, clothes, or any of those comforts that even the manliest of Frenchmen finds it hard to do without.

But Noemie laughed his objections to scorn.

There was Terry's dressing-room to ransack, and Terry's man to valet him, and perhaps Terry himself would walk in to entertain him by and by (which M. Laurent dimly hoped he would not): and what could any man born of woman do but stay?

Possibly the idea of Terry's wrath at finding him there did but add poignancy to the situation in both M. Laurent's eyes and Noemie's; but certain it is that the little jade got herself dressed exquisitely for dinner, and that Suzette most heartily aided and abetted her in making the very best of the beauty with which nature had provided her.

So that when the two young people met in the ugly drawing-room (M. Laurent having gone through some rather barbaric experiences at the hands of Tim, who deeply resented the loan of his master's hair-brushes), they almost flew to each other, there was so much for Noemie to hear and for him to tell.

It was life to Noemie to be in touch once more with her beloved Paris, to hear of her father, of the theatres, of fashions, and *bibelots*, of the frivollings of her friends, and the little *faux pas* of her enemies; and as he talked to her, she seemed to breathe the very

atmosphere of the city, to smell its flowers, the intangible aroma of its streets, and her heart throbbed with longing for the time when she would once more be in the midst of it all.

M. Alphonse, overjoyed at having a well-known *gourmet* for whom to provide, exhausted the resources of his skill in sending up a dinner worthy of the occasion, and afterwards confided to Suzette that when gentlemen left their young wives in a huff, it was just as well that young wives should amuse themselves, instead of sitting down to cry.

And if Noemie's mirth were a little wild, it passed unnoticed even by Tim, who helped to wait on them, and whose glowering looks ought to have spoilt the flavor of every dish that passed through his hands, if it did not actually poison them.

What did *she* mean by dressing herself up like that, piling up her dark hair till it looked

like a fright, and showing her bare skin in a white frock like some painted play-woman? She was a bad lot, — these French madames were all bad lots, — and this was her lover, sneaking in the moment Terry's back was turned, no doubt in response to her own special invitation. If only his master would come back and kick the interloper out! Meanwhile Tim decided that he would keep a close watch on the pair, and do the kicking out himself if he considered it absolutely necessary. For Tim adored two persons only in the whole world, himself and Terry. Anything that might advance the interests of those two persons, however flagitious and improper it might be, was right, and every scheme or undertaking that did not tend to their glory and honor, was wrong — and Tim could not see that his master's marriage had been to the advantage of either of them.

Terry had been twice as happy and lively

with his liberty and nothing at all a year — for the gay Paris life was as utterly unsuited to his taste as the howling melancholy of Wrostella, and Tim thought far the best thing for Madame was to pack her home to her father where she could frivol as much as she pleased and be happy.

Meanwhile Tim resolved to keep a sharp lookout on the post-bag when brought in by M. Alphonse's factotum, and if Terry *should* write to his wife — well, waiting a bit for her letter would do her no harm.

And like a child, or a pent-up brook that overflows, Noemie chattered, *chattered*, and it was not one of the least of M. Laurent's charms that he was an excellent listener, though he insensibly guided the conversation into such currents as he wished.

The two French figures, the luxurious table, and a bit of wainscoted wall beyond, formed one of those pictures that a clear hand

would have converted into a masterpiece of *genre* painting; and M. Laurent, being a man of taste, felt the picturesqueness of the situation and enjoyed it.

Once, during that bright, sunshiny evening, Noemie started, and looked hastily around as if suddenly wakened from a dream.

She was sitting here, just as on any other night during the past three months, with a man on the other side of the hearth — just he and she in the circle of warmth and lamplight — but this man, whose talk exhilarated, cheered, and satisfied her hungry heart, was not Terry — but somebody else.

It crossed her mind suddenly, "How if this man were her husband, and Terry, her lover, might at any moment walk in?"

Her pulse bounded — she trembled — she knew then that lover or husband, Terry must be her lord, and that if it all had to come over again, she would follow him just as un-

hesitatingly to the dreariness of Wrostella, as she had refused all the refinements of love and life that this charming Parisian could have given her.

Her gayety suddenly died out. M. Laurent, watching her without seeming to do so, had too intimate an understanding with women not to divine her thoughts, and he was perfectly aware that the disillusioning process of marriage had set in, and he was curious to see how things turned out. How would she develop? how, and with what weapons, fight the eternal battle between man and woman that has been fought with varying fortunes ever since the world began?

He had loved her once — in a way he loved her still, and all that was best in him woke in pity for this young, frail girl, so early deserted, and left here alone with that eternal dirge, as for everlasting death, wailing on the seashore.

He pleaded fatigue, and retired early, parting with her at the top of the wide, shallow stairs, where the light of the candle held in her slack hand, touched and made but the lovelier her little face that character seemed to be moulding into new shape.

"Poor little soul," he said to himself in the dreary apartment that no fire could warm, and then a "stitch" in the side caught him, and stopped his breath, and presently another, and long before morning he was forced to ring the bell and summon assistance, being, indeed, almost helpless in the grip of a sharp attack of pneumonia.

Noemie had lain tossing through the earlier part of the night; for now that the excitement of seeing M. Laurent was over, she felt only the hard pain of desertion, of shame, of hurt, of the whole bitter humiliation of her position in the eyes of her household and her guest. Towards morning she fell asleep,

and so missed the sound of bells, the opening and shutting of doors, and the heavy tread of Alphonse, who at the first alarm flew to the sick man, never leaving him till every remedy at hand had been applied; for if Tim adored his master, Alphonse regarded M. Laurent as the very type of what a French gentleman should be, and never to his dying day felt anything but contempt for a woman who could reject him.

Suzette seconded him admirably, and did not consider it necessary to waken Noemie, who was indeed tossing restlessly about the whole night, though the walls were so thick she heard no disturbance.

Tim also proved himself unusually amenable, and actually volunteered to go in search of that almost impossible luxury, a doctor, actually returning with one before breakfast.

He had been summoned once before to Wrostella, but on a different errand, and he

glanced curiously at the shooting-gallery, as he passed it, remembering what had lain there when last he had crossed its threshold.

"Does he walk still?" he said curiously to Tim, who was conducting him.

"Who says so, sir?" inquired the young Irishman quickly.

"Oh! then he doesn't," said the doctor dryly, and said no more.

He did his best for M. Laurent, wondering not a little at his presence there, and at the absence of the husband of the most lovely little creature he had ever beheld even in a country famous for its fair women, and went away at last with an odd feeling that he had stepped out of his own prosaic life into a bit of romance, in which all the figures were French and uncommon.

Decidedly uncommon, and the situation was uncommon too. What did a man mean by going off and leaving a young wife like

that? and what did a handsome young man mean by paying an afternoon visit in the wilderness, a visit that would extend to at least two or three weeks?

"A ghastly house and a ghastly condition attached to it," he said to himself, as he set out on a twenty-mile jolt across the bog, "and if I knew where Fitzgerald was to be found, I'd write and tell him to come home. Not that the Frenchman will be able to think of love-making for some time to come."

And then the doctor smiled. He enjoyed a good three-volume novel when he could get it, but still better a drama, and here was a human one unrolling itself before his very eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

"O haud your tongue o' your former vows,
For they will breed sad strife;
O haud your tongue o' your former vows,
For I am become a wife."

M. RICHEPIN had known perfectly well what he was about when he encouraged the young man whom he would have liked for his son-in-law to pay Wrostella a visit.

Did the experienced man, indeed, think that a little company might be good for these two poor young people thrown so absolutely on each other, nay, that even a little jealousy might not be amiss in the deadly dulness of the Wrostella *ménage?*

He was far too fond of Noemie, and too keenly interested in her happiness, not to be aware that this virtual exile would be one of

extraordinary trial to her, even though the favoring influence of love was at hand to help her.

And when by degrees, and quite unconsciously to herself, a tone of weariness crept over her letters, he read easily enough between the lines, and, but that he was a wise man, would have gone to his child, or affected illness and summoned her home to him.

When he wrote asking if she were ill, she replied with forced gayety, and charged her letters with requests for books, sweetmeats, and a many other commissions of trifling consequence; and he observed too that she often sent a message to her friend Lucille, which showed that she had ceased to correspond with her friend. He needed no telling that the young people were quite naturally and inevitably getting tired of an unstinted banquet of their own company, and he was

racking his brains how to create a "diversion," and distract their attention from each other, when M. Laurent happened to say one day that he had friends in Londonderry who had again written, pressing him to visit them.

"They are charming people," M. Laurent had said, "but what could I do in Ireland?"

"You might go over to Wrostella to see what sort of a cage contains my bird," M. Richepin had said calmly; and M. Laurent had flushed, looked keenly at his old friend, and made no reply. And when a week or so later he casually asked if he could undertake any commissions to Mrs. Fitzgerald, M. Richepin cordially accepted the invitation, and intrusted him with a good many, and finally saw the young man off without a single doubt or tremor as to results.

"Mr. Terry wants a lesson," he said to himself as he went to the house that always seemed empty now; "and as to Noemie, I

have no fear for her. If only she had chosen differently—"

And thus it had fallen out that M. Laurent had appeared at Wrostella. It required a good deal of nerve, perhaps, to pay an afternoon call on the woman he still loved and the man who had cut him out, in the wilderness; and it is possible that the contingency of being shown the door crossed the young man's mind as he journeyed across the bog, though very real bodily discomfort had the effect of causing imaginary troubles to dwindle, and he felt chilled to the bone when at last he reached his destination.

He had felt more and more pity for her as he retreated farther and farther from civilization; but the sight of the jail-like habitation that held M. Richepin's gay song-bird, affected him painfully, and it was scarcely a surprise to him to discover, as he very quickly did, that she was so lonely, so un-

happy, that the mere sight of a friend was to her as water to the traveller on desert-sands.

True, she had been disappointed at sight of him; but her very disappointment told its own tale of her husband's desertion, and it had not taken him long to find out that she did not even know where that husband was, or when to expect his return.

And it touched him profoundly to see with what spirit she bore a position that most women would have found intolerable; and when he went to bed that night he admired her more than ever, and hated Terry with a heartiness that made him long to administer that castigation which he richly deserved.

But within a very few hours real, alarming illness put everything out of his mind; and during the next few days he was engaged in a sharp fight for his life, the issue of which was more than once doubtful, so that Suzette and Alphonse mingled their tears together over

the possible demise of one of the *fine fleur* of French aristocracy.

But he did not die. He was young, his constitution was sound, his doctor efficient, and his nursing and nourishment of the very best.

Perhaps a kind little message from Noemie now and then helped him; and when he had conveyed an intimation of his whereabouts to his friends in Londonderry, he resigned himself to the inevitable, and set about getting well again as fast as he possibly could.

And Noemie, left alone, had ample leisure in which to reflect on Terry's misdemeanors, now more deeply aggravated by the fact that he had not written a line to her since his departure, so that she knew neither where he was, nor when to expect his return.

True, she had behaved outrageously at his departure, but his hot Irish temper had flamed

out just as violently as hers, and he had treated her discourteously; and pride arose, forbidding her heart to ache for the loss of his love, and actually suggesting the impossible feat of henceforth living her life without it.

Some women might do so,—indeed, many do,—but Noemie was not one of them. As the days went by, a feeling of almost physical cold and wretchedness oppressed her; for it was a new and extraordinary sensation to her to be treated like a naughty child, and, as it were, put in a corner, and left to mind and care for herself, not knowing how. Her heart went out then to her father,—the father whose life-long devotion she had slighted for this charming stranger, who had ceased so quickly to be charming, and who had seized the very first opportunity to leave her.

But all these phases of feelings, and many others, passed, and the girl, thrown at last

entirely on her own resources, found them much greater than she had supposed. She was full of character, if capable of folly; and the sharp experience through which she was passing had a bracing instead of a depressing effect upon her, while the presence of M. Laurent at Wrostella gave a strong spice of excitement to the whole situation.

Mischief danced in her eyes at the thought of Terry's face when he returned; and she rehearsed with much *diablerie* the scene, when, as hostess to the convalescent, and right under Terry's nose, she should lavish upon him those attentions that his condition made perfectly excusable. For, of course, her husband might be back at any moment; and in her heart — which was of gold — Noemie knew that she would be very glad to see him, and was equally sure that he would be rejoiced to see her.

All the same she meant to lead him a dance;

but as the days passed, and the time approached when M. Laurent would be sufficiently recovered to lie on the sofa in the drawing-room, and sit at table with her, she grew impatient; and the play bored her, now that the central figure was left out.

Might she not measure the hurt inflicted upon him by her passionate words, by the resentment he evidently felt towards her?

Gradually the spring left her step; and it began to dawn upon her that sometimes, when we are getting a lesson ready for somebody, *he* is, in fact, teaching us one already, and in such fashion that reprisals are not possible.

Once she drew in her breath sharply. Yes, it was a large order, to go off without a word for a quite indefinite time, leaving no address —"a bachelor with the comforts of home," she thought scornfully, when he should be pleased to return to them! Her position

before her own household was one of intense humiliation, and sometimes, like many another spoiled child, she longed to give back slap for slap, and scorn for scorn, to the man who had insulted her, to the bitter end.

And she soon found out that it is one thing to make a supreme effort, and another to find the courage to sit up day after day through elaborate meals, opposite an empty chair that mocks you, with servants sniggering behind your back, and wondering how much longer you will be able to keep back your tears and hold up. Courage is not endurance, and she needed both; but in this hitherto untried girl lurked more than one of her father's especial characteristics, and, quite unknown to herself, circumstances (at the expense of her happiness) were rapidly developing her character, and mightily enriching it.

Often and wistfully she thought of the summer-day life she had left — yes — but had

it been good for her? Had it not made her headstrong, ungrateful to her father, and oblivious of all his devotion, even as it had made her passionate, and without self-control and self-resource, in her life at Wrostella?

More and more she thought of her father, her bright companion since infancy, her best friend, and the keenness of her ingratitude smote her hard. It is only when we are ourselves ungratefully treated that we know how we have made others suffer, and mourn for ourselves and for them.

These were some of the questions that the girl asked herself during the first days of M. Laurent's illness; but her heart was not yet stirred to its depths, nor her conscience fully awakened, for anger against Terry was the most dominant feeling in her breast. And the fat old docter came and went.

"My husband will be here soon," said Noemie, with stubborn lips, when the doctor

asked the usual question on his daily visit; and now ten days had gone by, and M. Laurent would very soon be able to occupy a sofa in the drawing-room.

"What does the fellow mean?" said the old man irascibly one day to the Frenchman. "Has she no friends to bring him to book? To bring her *here*, to this God-forsaken, haunted spot, and leave her alone for days, and almost weeks together, except for your company!" he added grimly.

M. Laurent looked grave, and felt thoroughly uncomfortable.

These Irishmen were devils of fellows for jealousy; and supposing Terry knew of his presence here, and did not mean to return till he had cleared out?

"When can I travel, M. le docteur?" he said.

"H–m! if you go on at this rate, and the weather's good, and you're made up into a

bundle of blankets, you can breathe fresh air in — say, a week."

"Then, if I can breathe fresh air, I can travel," said M. Laurent, who was sitting up in bed, looking pale and very handsome in gorgeous bed-raiment furnished by Alphonse.

"To the devil if you like!" said the doctor irascibly.

"Oh, I've been there," said M. Laurent; "I meant to Londonderry."

"In a year, perhaps — or a month," said Dr. Donellan more irritably still; "and what you wanted to come here for at all, *I* don't know. It will make things all the worse for that poor little girl when Fitzgerald *does* come back. A queer lot — queer root and branch. Do you ever see anything here?" he added, as he buttoned up his shabby overcoat, previous to departing on his cheerless, dispiriting round.

"No; surely it's all talk?"

The doctor shook his head. "There's something," he said, "and I've my own theory about suicides. And the last man here suicided — and there are queer tales told of Wrostella."

"Is that sort of thing in the family?" said M. Laurent, startled; "if so, perhaps —"

"Stuff! A lovers' quarrel. Was it about *you?*" added Dr. Donellan point-blank.

"I daren't flatter myself with such a hope."

"But you admired her — before marriage."

"Naturally."

"And she preferred him?"

"Evidently."

"Then let her alone, young man, let her alone. You're a good-looking fellow, and you've got a way with you — and her heart's sore and angry — and that's how women give themselves away."

M. Laurent replied with some haughtiness that Mrs. Fitzgerald was the last person in

the world to display such misplaced generosity; but after the well-meaning old man had gone M. Laurent remained for some time wrapped in thoughts the reverse of agreeable.

It had been bad enough for her before he came — it would be much worse now; and, supposing the angry husband refused to listen to explanations, it would be a nice little kettle of fish for everybody.

He scarcely heard Suzette's voice urging him to take his chicken broth, made to perfection, and served in daintiest style.

"You are worrying, Monsieur," she said calmly, when at last he looked at her, "and if you do that, you will not get well so quick." He took the tray on his knees; and now her hands were at liberty, they went into her smart pockets which matched her high-heeled shoes, drawn together with a click, as she stood all attention.

"How is your mistress to-day?" he said, as he fed himself languidly.

Suzette shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows. Then she sighed ostentatiously, her whole pert, pretty figure expressing mingled commiseration and contempt.

"She is not ill, I hope," said M. Laurent, alarmed, who had indeed until now dexterously eluded the maid's confidences about her mistress.

"Ill! How, pray, can she be well, Monsieur, with a husband who insults her before all her *ménage?* who goes away 'for a few days,' he says, and leaves no address — a married man, *figurez-vous*, and remains almost *weeks!* And not to write one line!"

"Perhaps he is ill," said M. Laurent.

"Ill! *non, non!* There is a woman in the case, Monsieur — Tim knows all about it."

M. Laurent colored, and pushed the tray roughly into her hands.

"Take it away," he said, then turned his back on her, much to the Frenchwoman's disgust, so that he did not see the backward tilt of her head, and the scornful uprightness of her flexible figure as she marched out at the door.

"And had it come to this," he thought, with a very real ache in his heart, "that this young, passionately cherished girl was already deserted for some more experienced woman, who had perchance loved Terry as extravagantly as Noemie, almost at first sight, had done?"

"He seems the very devil of a fellow with women," thought M. Laurent with some envy; and then he thought of M. Richepin, of his implacable rage at such treatment of his daughter, of how he would assuredly take her away from Fitzgerald, and of what a terrible struggle must henceforth convulse the poor child's life.

If ever she had wanted a friend in her life, she wanted one to stand by her now; and he could do nothing — worse than nothing — and by remaining here probably served her worse than by any other thing he could do under heaven.

Alone she must fight it out, poor, lonely girl; and if she were of the stuff that breaks its heart over treachery and deceit, why, it must break, and no one could help her.

From this dangerous mood of pity M. Laurent rushed to one of burning indignation, in which his fingers itched to be at Terry, administering the thrashing he so richly deserved.

But even while his blood tingled, a sense of his own utter weakness overcame him, convincing him how impossible his championship of anybody was just then; and when Alphonse came in he found his adored hero in a dead faint.

CHAPTER V.

"Had I kent that ere I cam here,
I ne'er had come to thee;
I might have had a king's daughter,
Had it no been for love of thee."

"You have been very ill, Monsieur."

"Forgive me, Madame — I am desolate at the trouble I have given you and your household —"

Her little hand was in his, and he stooped suddenly over it, as if to hide from herself and him the tears that he knew were springing to her eyes.

"It was nothing," she said uncertainly, and moving away from the couch, piled up with cushions, upon which Alphonse had installed his charge; "and it is delightful to

know that you did not come to this dreary place to die."

Her voice was firm; and he knew that the tears would not pass her eyelids, such self-control had she learned in the suffering and solitariness of the past fortnight.

"Is it not strange," she said, as she stood at a distant window, looking out, with something in her attitude that showed how habitual that sad looking-out had become, "that here there is no sign of spring? There is only the sea and the sky — and it is hot or it is cold, and that is only how we can tell the seasons."

She had talked down her tears, those tears that the first kind look or word she had had in all her trouble drew from her; for there had only been Suzette, whose sympathy was that of the average servant — sawdust.

"You will soon be in Paris now," he said, as she turned and came back, "and how

rejoiced your father — all of us will be to have you there again!"

But Noemie's eyes, looking beyond him, did not see Paris, or anything but an appalling loneliness, in which Terry was not, and she herself wandered desolate, like a child thrust out alone in the cold to starve and die.

"Poor father," she said, below her breath, and suddenly looking at M. Laurent with M. Richepin's eyes, saw that he was manly, interesting, and kind.

She sat down near him; and they talked of his illness, the weather, the loves of Alphonse and Suzette — of everything, in short, but her heart and Terry.

Gradually she felt herself soothed and comforted, insensibly raised in her own estimation by the respect and regard with which he treated her, and before long she actually laughed — to his intense delight and inward

triumph, for he had set himself deliberately to win back her gayety, and meant to succeed.

Soon they were talking airily, cheerfully, the irrepressibility of youth breaking out in Noemie at the mere sound of her own voice and a friend's; and long before the evening was over her horizon seemed to have cleared, and life to have still some possibilities for her.

"What if Terry had written?—written to make up, and the letter had been miscarried, and he was now waiting for a reply, too proud to come back until he heard from her?"

There was no regular post-bag at Wrostella; and the letters were brought mixed up with the far more important matters required by Alphonse, that it had occasionally happened that they had got sandwiched between certain tinned delicacies, and delivered to their owners a good many days after date.

"I will go through Alphonse's store cup-

board to-morrow," thought Noemie, as the young pair sat at the banquet faultlessly prepared by that worthy, and with full appreciation of the fact that M. Laurent was a connoisseur of the first water, upon whom no subtlest *nuance* of a cook's art was wasted.

It was all cheery, homelike, and delightful to poor Noemie after her lonely, solemn feasts; and with the usual impulse of happy folks to see others happy, she wished that Terry had been there to be happy too.

In the drawing-room after dinner she brought to her guest an old album of Terry's, one of the few personal belongings he had brought with him to Wrostella.

His own portrait, sunny-faced, bright-haired, and that glance which threw spells over pretty well all the men and women he met, looked out at them from the front page, and M. Laurent said, —

"What a good-looking fellow he is!"

"Yes."

She turned the page hurriedly, and almost loved Laurent for the speech.

The portraits were not interesting — probably no family collection ever is. But towards the end of the book appeared one that looked out of place, it was so strikingly modern and beautiful.

"Is she not lovely?" said Noemie as Laurent bent to look at it. "She is the wife of my husband's greatest friend."

M. Laurent started, and the words "I have seen her" almost escaped his lips

Yes, he had seen her — with Terry, at a Parisian *café;* but there had been no husband with them, and she had been behaving in a woman's usual way when she prefers her husband's friend to her husband.

But he did not tell Noemie. Write it up to the honor of men that he did not tell her, — and never intended to.

"Yes — she is lovely," he said, and went on to the next page.

He seemed to flag a little after that; and soon Alphonse came and took him away to bed, but he left some of his resolute brightness behind with Noemie and — it was the first time for many nights — she slept soundly and had pleasant dreams.

But diligent overhauling of Alphonse's cupboards next morning did not discover any such thing as a letter. Alphonse indeed assisted at the search with a glum demeanor that plainly said, "You will find nothing;" and indeed he had private reasons for knowing Terry to have other work just now than writing to his wife.

Noemie's heart sank a little; but she would not allow herself to get miserable again, and a good stock of courage enabled her to hold up until M. Laurent appeared, so much better that he declared he would be able to

set out in two days for Londonderry — if she would let Alphonse wrap him up in every rug and shawl the place contained.

This Noemie positively refused to do; and there was much gay talk of captivity, which hid M. Laurent's very real determination to know no rest till he had discovered what had become of Terry, and whether accident or deliberate wickedness kept him from Wrostella. But this she must not know; and so with jest and song, and some idle shooting in the gallery (where Noemie amazed him with her skill), the following few days passed, full of brightness to the girl who was charmed out of her thoughts, but to the man days of severest struggle, pain, and self-restraint. For her behavior under a cruel ordeal did but make him regret her all the more intensely, love her all the more truly, and inspire him with an admiration that all her wayward beauty had never inspired in him; and he

knew that had he been so fortunate as to win her, she would have upheld his honor at all hazards, and that she had character of the noblest kind. It is in a woman's conduct as wife that the man who has loved and lost her discovers of what stuff she is really made; and this man suffered intensely in beholding the jewel that he had coveted, thrown carelessly into the lap of one who neither valued nor deserved it. He had loved Noemie — he had not been indifferent to her money; but now he loved her with something better and purer than all the rest, and he feared lest the strength of his regard for her should become apparent. She liked him: she had almost forgotten that he had been her lover, and that she had boxed his ears — assuredly he was not ridiculous to her now — and a woman can like a man so, and be even tender to him, because he is her friend, but a man cannot like a woman in the same

way, and for him the situation is one of continual danger.

And for his own sake, because he could not bear to see her face fall, perhaps her tears, when he told her, he forebore to give the slightest hint of his departure on the morrow, on that last evening which they spent so happily together at Wrostella.

A stranger looking in at the cosey interior made by the bright fire and lights and flowers, and the beauty of the two young people as they sat and chatted happily together, might well have been excused for thinking that they were bride and bridegroom who had brought their own sunshine into the dismal house of Wrostella.

And it was on that very night that the sinister incident occurred of which mention has been made in the introduction to this story.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

"O, dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
When we sate at the wine,
How we changed the napkins from our necks,
It's no sae lang, suisyne?"

A DOOR at the end of the corridor suddenly opened, and the face of Tim, pale, menacing, and strange, appeared in the aperture.

He was looking at his mistress as she descended to breakfast, her French heels tapping smartly on the boards; her yellow and white morning-gown, a miracle of freshness and frivolity, trailing behind her; her little sleek head dressed with consummate

133214B

skill, and the first roses in her cheeks that her little hand had ever planted there.

As if all these outward and visible signs of health and prosperity were not sufficient, she was humming an air — and quite loud enough, too, to display the quality of a most charming voice — which seemed, however, to have no charm for Tim, who shook his fist frowningly at her vanishing back.

Breakfast was laid for two in the dining-room, a French *dejeuner à la fourchette*, probably the daintiest, most delicious meal to which a human being can sit down, and, when served by a *cordon bleu*, not to be matched by the finest dinner or supper ever invented by a culinary genius. M. Laurent was already there, and two men-servants were busying themselves about the table; and in a quick whisper Noemie said to herself, —

"Three."

"You slept well, Monsieur?" she said

calmly, when they were seated at table with the delicious fragrance of Alphonse's coffee diffusing itself in the air.

"Admirably. And you?"

He was helping himself from a silver dish as he spoke, preoccupied for the moment with the supreme happiness of a *gourmet*, who enjoys at once the pleasures of hope and the certainty of their immediate gratification.

"Well enough," she replied; then with the same curiously intent eyes, looked at the serving men, who moved about as usual, and remained perfectly vacuous under her scrutiny.

"I must somehow manage to see every man who slept in this house last night," she said to herself, as she pretended to eat; and it did not seem strange to her that yesterday she had been an unthinking child, and the night's events had changed her to a criminal —just one moment of mad panic, of un-

reasoning, cowardly fear, and the transformation was complete — and her first impulse had been to cover up her deed, until she could confess it to her husband, or until she was denounced by the man who had stolen in like a thief in the night, and got a thief's welcome.

M. Laurent was also eating nothing, as if for once M. Alphonse had disappointed him. He was looking keenly at Noemie — at her young mouth curved into proud, firm lines, the pallor that her roses could not hide, at the whole nameless change that had passed over her since they parted one night, and knew that some new ill had befallen her, and that she did not mean to tell it.

His continued silence at last roused her: she looked up and their glance met.

At once proud, brave, and forlorn, but with a courage beyond and above the mere courage of despair, were the eyes that met his; and

for a moment his breath was checked, realizing that "*un grand malheur a passé par là,*" and that he was powerless to help her, for that she would not let him.

"You have had bad news," he said slowly, as one who expects no reply.

"No. The post is not yet in. I have had no news."

The enormous stride in suffering she had made during the last few hours seemed to have altered the very shape of her face and the tone of her voice, and seemed to have put her leagues and leagues away from him; yet he knew that here was a soul in anguish that cried out to him, even while it warned him off.

"You are ill — suffering," he said with that note of real love in his voice which no woman can mistake, and through her stony isolation the human sound pierced and made her tremble. She looked up at him pitifully

as he came and stood beside her (the men having left the room) and he said, —

"What can I do for you, Noemie?"

It was the first time he had ever called her by her name, but she did not misunderstand him.

"Bring me Terry," she said in a hoarse whisper; "wherever he is, find him and bring him — before I go mad."

"I will find him — if he is alive," said M. Laurent simply. "Have you any clew?" and then he thought of Tim's hints. All the while he was fiercely envying the fellow who through good and evil report was so loved of Noemie — herself so worthy of all that was best in a man's nature.

Perhaps she divined his thoughts, divined too that his love was something more to her than his hottest fancy had ever been; and she was glad, yes, glad through all her hopeless misery, that such a precious love should be

hers, and there flashed a light on her face that told him how royally she gave him thanks for a gift that ennobled and raised her.

"Has he any near relations?" said M. Laurent, when they next moved a little apart, and he felt himself a hypocrite for asking the question.

"None."

"Any intimate friends to whom he would be likely to go?"

"He has a great many friends; but his only intimate one is Captain Trelawney, the husband of the woman you saw in the album."

"Do you know where his regiment is quartered?"

"At Plymouth."

"A long way," said M. Laurent, making a rapid calculation, "and he has been gone—"

"Just fourteen days."

"Trelawney—Trelawney—" muttered M. Laurent, knitting his handsome brows, "what

did I hear about some one of that name? A *fracas* between two officers, something about a duel."

He turned quickly towards Noemie, who was gazing straight before her with that nameless new look in her glorious eyes that had come in the night, — the look of one who felt herself "alone on a wide, wide sea" with neither God nor man to help her.

"Poor little woman," he said from his very heart, and would have taken the poor little hand that hung beside her; but she snatched it violently away, and put it behind her back.

"You mustn't" she said breathlessly, "you mustn't touch it — you don't know — "

"All this trouble is turning her brain," he thought, and cursed Terry from the very depths of his soul.

"Let me send for your father," he said anxiously. "You must not be here alone. The place, the monotony, are killing you."

She shook her head, but made no answer, only moaning a little like a child who has a hurt it dare not disclose.

He turned abruptly away, madly tempted to take her in his arms and comfort her, and knowing too that she would not let him while he would ruin himself for ever and ever in her estimation.

He came back when he was calmer, and said, "The sooner I start the better. I had already decided to go to-day, and everything is in readiness."

Noemie shivered; and the thought of all that she had done, all that she had to face alone, rushed over her with overwhelming force.

Where was he — who was he — her murdered man? and into what hell of fortune had one moment of mad, unreasoning panic thrust her?

For one wild moment she trembled on the

verge of confession to this man who thought the best of her, who was *sorry* for her; then that intense loyalty which was one of her chief characteristics denounced such confidence as a wrong to Terry, and she forced herself to calmness.

"God bless you for going," she said steadily. "He may be ill — have had an accident, and been unable to write, and in my wicked temper I have not even attempted to find out. I might have sent Tim —"

"Who is no friend of yours," said M. Laurent. "If ever a man was a Machiavelli in disguise, it's that Irishman. I caught him listening at the key-hole yesterday."

"Tim," said Noemie drearily, "is my husband's henchman, his body slave, who has been with him all his life, and thinks that, like the king, he can do no wrong, except perhaps in marrying me. On that point I am convinced he thinks his master made a

great mistake. You will telegraph to me," she added restlessly, "and write, and if he should come back," she added with a lift in her voice, "I will let you know immediately, but where?"

"Better address to the Hotel Laurent," he said, "as my whereabouts will be uncertain, and messages can be forwarded to me from there. I will say good-by now," he added abruptly, wishing to get the parting over as quickly as possible.

"Thank you," she said mechanically. She was looking full at him, but really saw a face reflected in a glass, the eyes meeting her own — she felt her hand on the trigger, and then —

M. Laurent stooped and picked up the little shape in its flowing white and yellow draperies, and laid it on the sofa.

God giveth his beloved sleep — and in the deep sleep of unconsciousness lay poor Noe-

mie, all her anguish for one little space forgotten. How pale was the little face, how deep were the shadows between the dark lashes, how tired the close folded lines of the young mouth that surely was made for kisses, smiles, and laughter!

He knelt down and softly touched with his lips the hand she had denied him, then, without one backward look, left her.

CHAPTER II.

"And then he brewed a black revenge ;
And then he vowed a vow."

SUZETTE, with a vast amount of hartshorn, burnt feathers, and eau-de-cologne was going through various graceful exercises in the recovery of her mistress, and grumbling to herself very heartily all the while.

Here was M. Laurent departing, the one oasis of brightness in this howling wilderness, and Alphonse accompanying him a part of his way, her mistress in a dead faint (the reason for which was not far to seek); and to cap everything Tim had met with an accident that morning, and had shocked her nerves with the sight of blood.

Suzette's nerves were delicate, and Al-

phonse had ceased to be interesting, and she had quite made up her mind that nothing on earth should induce her to stay the four months out at Wrostella.

That is the enormous advantage that maids have over mistresses — they can shift their house and their company at will — the mistresses have no choice but to remain in the places that for good or ill they have chosen. And Suzette was of the class to whom the house and the quality of the servants' hall is everything, and the mistress nothing.

When Noemie at last opened her eyes, the haunting fears that dog criminals made her clutch at Suzette as if for protection, then her eyes wandered round the room, and she saw M. Laurent's empty chair, and remembered.

"M. Laurent has gone?" she said, with that coldness in her voice which Suzette secretly resented.

"He is now departing, Madame. *Mon Dieu*, but it is a morning of *malheurs!* That stupid Tim must needs shoot himself —"

"*What!*" cried Noemie, springing to her feet. "Bring him here — this moment — quick!"

She stamped her foot, and the Frenchwoman ran to the door.

"I cannot have killed him, or she would not have spoken like that," she whispered to herself hoarsely. "But how dared he steal into my room — a spy, M. Laurent said. Well, he has got only a spy's deserts —"

A violent rap on the door came at this juncture, followed by the abrupt entry of a typical young Irishman, tall and well grown, and of that turn of feature which is positively agreeable on some occasions and downright ferocious on others.

He stood just inside the door, and his expression was positively malignant as he said,—

"You sent for me, ma'am?"

She walked straight up to him, and pointing her forefinger at a large stain on the breast of the white blouse he wore, said, —

"That is blood."

"It is nothing," he said stubbornly; "a little accident when I was cleaning firearms in the gallery, but no harm was done."

Noemie was rubbing one hand — her right — softly up and down her skirt; but suddenly she stopped, and threw up both arms with a wild, exultant cry of gratitude, of joy, of reverent thanks to God.

"Tim," she cried in esctasy, "I did not kill you, I only hurt you a little. Oh, thank God! thank God!"

She was a free woman once more, and the stain of blood guiltiness was lifted from her soul; and by the measure of her relief she knew now what had been her agony during the past hours.

Tim stood looking at her with sombre, angry eyes.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mrs. Fitzgerald," he said at last. "You ain't done nothing to me as I knows of."

His sullen voice brought her back to earth. She rubbed her eyes and looked at him.

"You came into my room last night," she said, "and I shot you. I thought you was one of the peasants come to steal my jewels, and I was terrified and did not stop to think."

He answered not a word.

"You hear me,?" she said. "Answer!"

"I know nothing at all about it," he answered gruffly.

"How did you get into the room?" she said, looking at him with eyes that glowed like fires in her small, pale face. "What business had you there?"

"I don't know what you are talking

about," said Tim, his obstinate upper lip looking longer than ever.

"But there is the wound," she cried. "You can't deny that."

"I did it myself, ma'am. It was just a graze — no more. You've been dreaming, and didn't shoot anybody."

She shook her head.

"I could show you the revolver," she said; "and there were — other things. Tim, do you walk in your sleep?"

Tim meditated.

"I may," he said cautiously; "but don't you always lock your door, ma'am?"

"Yes. But there is some secret way into my room — I'm sure of it —"

Tim's eyes flickered.

"And you know it," went on the girl rapidly. "Why won't you tell the truth?"

"You just dreamed it all, ma'am," he said stubbornly.

"Does one dream blood?" she demanded.

"Blood?" exclaimed Tim, as if in astonishment.

Noemie lost patience.

"When your master comes home, he shall get the truth out of you," she said angrily; "and, after all, you only had your deserts. Now go!"

But Tim lingered.

"If you'll take my advice, ma'am," he said very earnestly, "you won't say a word to master about it — not one word. It'll breed mischief. He's got trouble enough just now —"

"What trouble?" said Noemie swiftly.

Tim kept his eyes down, so that she could not see the baleful light in them.

"Tim," she said, with a proud dignity that sat well on her young face, "you have been many years with Mr. Fitzgerald, indeed, all his life, and I have only known

him a very few months. He — he did not want to worry me, and so he did not tell me why he went away in such a hurry. Was — was his errand a dangerous one?"

Tim's sharp wits seemed to be taking a long journey, and Noemie had to repeat her question.

"What I know, ma'am," he said at last, "is more guess-work than anything else. But I think —" he paused again as if seeking for spiritual direction — "I think he went to fight a duel."

Noemie turned white as snow, and all the light in her beautiful eyes went out suddenly.

"About a woman?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Noemie turned her back on the man, that he might not see the furious scarlet that rushed up over brow and cheek, stinging her with a sense of shame. She threw out her hand with a gesture of dismissal. She could

not have asked him another question to save her soul alive.

The door closed behind him. She had forgotten the catastrophe of the night before in the knowledge that her husband had loved some woman — loved her still sufficiently to fight a duel for her — possibly to get killed himself.

CHAPTER III.

"Now God you save, our queen, Madam,
And Christ you save and see!
Here you have chosen a new, new love,
And you will have none of me."

NOEMIE had that boundless capacity for despair known only to ardent, suffering youth; and in the days following on her discovery of the cause of Terry's absence, she went perilously near to some rash act that would have made it impossible for her, at least on earth, to suffer any more; but somehow those sacrificial hours wore themselves out, and from their ashes a new Noemie arose, for the old was dead.

The passionate, spoiled child of Paris, who lived but for the day and her own happiness, who grasped eagerly at what she wanted,

taking no heed to the needs and wants of others, was gone, and a woman with eyes and heart humanized by suffering had come in her place.

The storm of jealousy, of rage, of outraged pride, was over, and burning hatred of the unknown woman who had beckoned Terry away from her had burned itself out into a dull pain that never left her by night or day.

And she meant to endure it — meant to remain at her post until Terry returned, or announced that he did not mean to return, or until she heard that he was — dead.

But she felt to the inmost marrow of her being that he was not dead; and when there came no message from M. Laurent she knew that it was because he had something shameful to tell her, and that he did not know how to tell it, but he would have told her swiftly enough if her husband were dead.

And always she blessed God that the stain of murder was not on her soul, feeling that however hard the burden laid upon her, it was right compared with the punishment she deserved, and anger at Tim's intrusion was swallowed up in joy that he was yet alive.

And yet she did not find herself able to speak to or even to seem to see him when they met about the house, and reluctantly he admitted to himself that she was a "spunky" one, and afraid of nothing, not even of visitants from the other world.

For immediately following M. Laurent's departure, indeed, as if it had waited for it with a politeness that is not common with ghosts, "Wrostella's Weird," for so, with a fine mingling of a man, his house, and his fate, the ghost had been designated who was supposed to haunt the castle, walked in a way that was "painful and free," frightening Suzette into fits, and greatly strengthening

Alphonse's desire to return to his beloved Paris.

Only two persons in the castle seemed unaffected by the apparitions, and these were Noemie and Tim; the first because her whole attention just then was concentrated on herself, and Tim because, as he averred, "he was used to 'em," and thought no more of a ghost's little ways than he did of a cook's tantrums.

The shooting-gallery was the place most affected by the ghostly visitant; and as Tim had no duties to speak of during his master's absence, and spent a good deal of his time there cleaning and arranging the various arms it contained, it might reasonably be supposed that he would be able to give the servants jim-jams in the servants' hall with accounts of what he saw there; but he related nothing, and, indeed, laughed to scorn the idea that the suicide's ghost was anywhere about.

And Noemie walked too — abroad among the peasants' miserable shanties, and for miles and miles along the seacoast, until the people got used to seeing her come and go, and marking the change in her, how she had altered from a mere frivolous French fashion-plate into a woman who suffered in spirit even as they did in body — came to look at her with pity, and even say a word of greeting to her as she passed.

And she answered them at first timidly, then with pleasure for the mere human kindness of their voices; and when she came to know them better, she saw how outrageous and wicked had been her fears of them; and the semi-famine in which they lived, and which was now revealed to her, filled the girl with shame when she thought of Alphonse and his prodigal waste.

Very soon the meals were curtailed at the castle, but food and money found its way into

the hovels on the shore; and in the joy of ministering to others — the greatest, the purest, surely in the whole world — Noemie in part was freed from the anguish of apprehension, jealousy, and anger, that Terry's continued absence caused her. Well, she had been a spoiled child, selfish and too happy, and wanted a good, rousing lesson; and now she had got it — a lesson that would last all her life, ay, and perhaps ennoble it, did she but know it.

She envied these poor toilers who had no sins upon their consciences, who had not been, like herself, within an ace of taking a human life, and even Terry's faults grew pale beside the thing that she had done; and so, between suffering and jealous pain, she dwindled day by day, and alarmed Suzette to the point of making her write secretly to M. Richepin with alarming reports of her mistress's health.

Alphonse wrote by the same post to say

that he was *desole* to make such a communication, but he found no scope whatever at Wrostella for his talents, and would M. Richepin graciously recall him? His cooking lately had been mainly confined to baking bread for the peasants, and the kitchen-maid was even better able to do such work than he.

M. Richepin read Alphonse's communication first, sighed, and shrugged his shoulders. If the cook could not do anything for these young people, nor M. Laurent (of whom he had heard nothing), then no one else could — he, himself, least of all.

But when he had read Suzette's letter, he was greatly disturbed, and would have started for Wrostella at once had not prudence mercilessly pointed out that if these two persons could not settle things happily by themselves, the interference of a third was not likely to have the effect of bringing them together.

But he wrote at once to Noemie, asking for

news of her, and saying with what pleasure he was looking forward to her approaching return to Paris. And he mentioned Terry as usual, though his heart was hot with rage within him, and he meant that there should be a heavy day of reckoning between them.

And it was well that M. Richepin sent a letter instead of conveying himself thither, for on the very day it arrived, Terry himself walked into Wrostella.

CHAPTER IV.

"And she behaved herself that day,
As if she had never walk't the way;
She had forgot her gown of gray."

"WHERE is your mistress?" he inquired of the man who stood in the doorway, staring at his master as at some perfectly unfamiliar person.

"She is visiting the poor people, Monsieur — sir, I mean," stumbled the man.

"Why do you call me Monsieur?" said Terry, with a pale look that still further confused the man.

"I — I have got used to addressing M. Laurent, sir," said the man, still with that odd look of doubt and wavering recognition.

"He is *here?*" said Terry sharply.

"He has left, sir."

And the man, now convinced of his master's identity, hurried out to take the portmanteau from the car.

Unutterably cold and dreary looked the whole place, Terry thought, as he entered, and glanced up the staircase down which he and Noemie had so often romped together, and he turned abruptly and went out towards the seashore.

"Visiting the poor! What hypocrisy would she not practise next?" he asked himself savagely, as he picked his way among the huge bowlders that cumbered the ground.

Terry's temper had altered considerably for the worse since his departure from Wrostella, so had his looks as well, and indeed it was difficult to recognize in this pale, thwarted, weary man, the bright-faced young fellow who had wooed and won difficult Noemie

with such extraordinary completeness and despatch.

He had been away barely a month, and already — he saw it in a gasp of astonishment and rage — his own wife did not know him.

She came quickly out of one of the cabins, laughing, with a little child clinging to her skirts, and, half-looking at him, turned away again as from a stranger, and tried to detach the little thin hands that would have held her back.

It was more than Terry could bear. He had loved her passionately, jealously, after the fashion of an Irishman, not an Englishman; and when she seemed to deny him thus openly, his blood took fire, and he sprang forward and seized her arm.

"Come home, madam!" he said. "Is the house so dull without your lover that you cannot bear to stay alone in it?"

She turned upon him a look of terror, thinking that some madman had overtaken her, then turned pale as she recognized him and gasped out,

"*Terry!*"

"At your service," he said, dragging her away, and Noemie all at once felt herself turning very cold and calm, and the contempt in her voice was merciless as she said, —

"You are bruising my arm. I can walk alone."

A bitter east wind was blowing up from the sea, loosening her dark curls, and flapping the capes of his ulster about his ears, and driving his hat over his brows. He loosed her and put up both hands, but he was too late — the wind had carried away his hat, and with it, as Noemie, in one lightning moment of horror believed, his head.

She stood still aghast, watching him as he

sprang after the two objects, now overtaking, now being eluded by them, until he finally captured both, and disappeared as if shot from a catapult into Wrostella.

Well, Noemie was young, was healthy; she had not suffered long enough to become fundamentally changed, and finally, when she grasped the situation, she sat down on a bowlder, and laughed — laughed till she nearly cried. In every possible character under the sun had she imagined Terry on his return, from Judas Iscariot down to Don Juan, but Terry in the character of a man who wore a wig had never occurred to her, and the discovery was even more ludicrous than startling.

Presently she wiped her eyes, which were as warm, as full of Southern glow as ever; and indeed, at the bottom of her heart, was the vivifying, all-sustaining fact that Terry was alive, that she had got him back again, and whether he wore a wig or had become in

his manners perfectly brutal, Terry was here, and — joy broke out in every dimple and curve of her young face — more in love with her than ever.

No matter what duels he might have fought, or in what flagitious circumstances he might have entangled himself, Terry was jealous — jealous to the extent of forgetting that he was a gentleman — and that must mean very tremendous jealousy and love indeed.

So that it was in high spirits, and with all high tragedy knocked out of her head (indeed, she had quite forgotten all the highfalutin speeches with which she had intended to denounce and upbraid him), that she entered Wrostella, and sent at once to Alphonse to say that Mr. Fitzgerald had returned, and would he send in something very nice for luncheon?

That is a woman's way. Her own heart,

her husband's comfort, these are the things that occupy her mind most.

Alphonse swallowed the insult magnanimously. When, indeed, had he ever failed to send in good things, even though he had been degraded to the post of baker in ordinary to the village?

Then she ran up-stairs singing. But half an hour may make all the difference in one's mood, and when Terry and she met at luncheon — approaching the table from opposite ends of the house — there was not a whit to choose between the cold politeness with which they greeted each other and passed the usual compliments of the table.

Tim, stationed once more behind his master's chair, was divided between radiant delight and alert curiosity as to what had passed between the pair; and if, under his smart serving-jacket, some uncomfortable qualms threatened to arise, he choked them

down, thinking, as Noemie had done, that nothing mattered much so long as Terry was there in the flesh before him.

Once in the midst of that formal talk, conducted without looking at each other, Noemie stole a glance at the sunny curls that still clustered thickly above Terry's white, thin face, and she thought that but for the uncourteous wind she might never have discovered the fraud; and yet, in some subtle way, it produced a harsh note of dissonance in his whole appearance, that, together with his worn look, had made his own servant and his wife fail to recognize him.

And while she pondered as to what strange accident could have brought him to such sad necessity, he, on his part, was covertly watching her, and finding a great alteration in her looks and ways.

He had left a girl, he found a woman.

The girl who had fallen out of love with

him as passionately and quickly as she had fallen in it, was gone; and the woman who looked her mistake fully and resolutely in the face, and accepted it, was here.

She spoke casually of M. Laurent, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that he should stay there in Terry's absence, and made no allusion whatever to the illness that had occasioned it.

Of Paris and their approaching return to it, she spoke airily and with keen pleasure; and as she sat there facing him, as politely charming as if he were an utter stranger, he told himself that this was marriage *à la mode* with a vengeance, but he would be hanged if he played the *rôle* for which she had evidently cast him.

Anyway, Noemie most consistently maintained hers. From the moment that she had seen Tim arranging his master's effects in a room as far as possible from hers, she had

abandoned all idea of attempting any understanding with her husband, and the longing she had felt to creep into his arms and tell him all the truth about that awful night, left her. Tim could tell him if he pleased, and Terry could think what he pleased, and indeed a strange look that she surprised sometimes on the face of the latter gave her reason to think that he *did* know, and regarded her with a kind of horror, as if her mad impulse of the moment had been a crime committed in cold blood, and rigorously to be expiated as one.

Noemie needed all her courage to carry her through that period of her life, and it did not fail her. Save at meal-times, the husband and wife never met; but often quite unsuspected by her, he watched her on her merciful errands among the poor; and while he scoffed at the idea of any real good being done (as well try to put the Atlantic through

a sieve, he thought, as to materially improve the position of these people), he could not but see how such work ennobled and beautified her, for it is the universal and not the selfish love that raises man and woman.

He went to meet her one afternoon as she was coming homeward, and said abruptly, —

"Don't you think that you are rather a contradiction? — that you can be so tender-hearted, yet try to kill a man?"

She drew a sharp breath, then looked at him with glorious brown eyes full of scorn.

"My sin," she said, "was unpremeditated — committed in a paroxysm of blind terror; but what of yours? I ask no questions — not of the woman for whom you went to fight a duel, not the reasons for the grotesque tricks you have played with your appearance, nor why I have been tried, found guilty, and judged unfit to be your wife, without being allowed to say one single word in self-

defence. You deserted me in the sight of my household; you have returned to shame me openly in their presence; and I look to you no longer for the comfort, support, and help that you swore to me but a very few months ago; and now you are no more to me than any stranger I may meet. Perhaps my heart might have broken had I not found the one, the only alleviation to suffering, which is to do good to others. And *that* joy," added the girl triumphantly, "even *you* cannot take from me."

They were at the doors of Wrostella by now, and passed in together.

Noemie moved towards the staircase, but he asked if she would mind coming for a moment into the study.

She came and stood in the bare, ugly room, with the cold wintry sunlight shining on her, waiting for him to speak.

The rose of her skin showed vividly

against the blackness of her furs. She was absolutely lovely, but cold, unapproachable as ice, and as utterly indifferent to his authority as his love; and the thought of how entirely she had put him outside her life stung him to madness, and he said, —

"Why did you not do your work more thoroughly while you were about it?"

Her lips curled. She turned to leave him, but he stood in her path.

"You looked me straight in the eyes," he said quietly, "before you fired; it was *not* a moment's madness, but a deliberate aim — and you meant to kill me. You were tired of me, and wished to replace me with M. Laurent."

Noemie had fallen back before him, her arms outstretched as if to beat him off, her face a mere gray mask of quivering horror, half out of her senses with the shock of his words.

She tried to speak but could not, tried again, and gasped out in an unearthly whisper, "It was Tim!"

Quite unconsciously she had seized his arm, and was shaking it with all her force.

He did not answer, and her dazed eyes wandered up to his head.

"Take it off," she said suddenly, but he drew himself up to his full height and refused.

"Better not," he said. "Wait till the wound has healed. It was only a scalp one, but —" he paused, and his haggard, white face filled up the pause.

"O my God!" cried Noemie, beating her breast, "and you thought I did it on purpose — I! Could I have become a murderess in the little time since you left me? Oh, there must be some means to rid the world of such a monster!" and she was rushing from the room when Terry caught her in his arms.

"Noemie! Little one!" he cried. "You did not want to put me out of the way, after all. It was me you loved, not Laurent?"

Eyes, voice, passionate embrace, all told the same story; and a faint color came into Noemie's face, that seemed to have "wilted" suddenly during the violent emotions of the past moments. But she put both hands on his shoulders, holding him back, and said, —

"How came you there, and by what secret way — *to spy on me?*"

Terry looked thoroughly ashamed, but the elixir of happiness had already made him himself again. Thin and pale he might be, and a country-made wig he might wear; but he was *Terry*, and the frost about Noemie's heart was melting fast — fast.

"We parted in anger," he said, "and I would not tell you that my best friend had been killed in a duel, or, rather, murdered, for there was foul play, and his widow, not

knowing that I was married, wrote imploring me to revenge his death. It was a long chase, but I found the man. We fought on the French frontier, and he was severely wounded. But first I wrote to you, asking your forgiveness for my unkind conduct to you, and at the same time to Tim, bidding him send me news of you. On my return to town, I found a reply from him. He said that you had sent for M. Laurent, that you behaved openly as lovers, and that I had better return at once — unobserved. You had not answered my letter, and I believed the worst. Tim added that he would be on the watch at Wrostella from midnight till morning for me, and the second midnight after receiving his letter I arrived."

Noemie drew herself out of his arms, and looked at him with proud inquiry and indignation.

"I don't know what he meant. He opened

to me before I could knock, and led me upstairs. He showed me a secret door in the panelled wall of your room, explained to me how it opened from inside, and bade me go in, '*for that some one was expected.*' I entered. I approached the mirror before which you sat, caught your words, and then — you looked me straight in the eyes, and fired from over your shoulder. The shot took effect on my head. I fell for the moment, then dragged myself up, and noiselessly escaped as I had entered. It was all clear to me — that you recognized and meant to kill me, afterwards saying that you fired in self-defence, supposing me to be a stranger; and M. Laurent's presence in the house supplied the reason.

"I fainted outside from loss of blood; Tim carried me into the shooting-gallery, tended me, and dressed the wound. Then he put me to bed in a small room beyond the gal-

lery, and there, keeping every one away with stories of the ghost, nursed me till I was convalescent. The wound was not serious; but all my hair at the top came off, and when I was able to travel I went by night to Londonderry and got fitted out — and very badly fitted — as you see. M. Laurent departed — I returned. At first I resolved on having the matter out with you; and I was violent, as you know, and naturally. Then you were so cold that you froze me, and I thought, 'This is a duel — we will see whose pride lasts out longest.' But to-day — seeing you so sweet, so womanly, to all the world but me — I broke down, and —"

He drew her eagerly into his arms.

"Forgive me, Noemie," he said; "it was pure jealousy — jealousy right through, and that Iago, Tim — out he goes. Kiss me, Noemie, kiss me, sweetheart, and forgive me — forgive me and forget the past month —"

Her young arms went softly up and round his neck.

"I'll forgive it all, and forget it all," she said, with her lips to his ear, "if *you'll* only forget and forgive poor Noemie's crime. And Tim must not go out. Oh, where's my letter, my precious letter," she added suddenly, "for which my heart and body *ached?* It was cruel of him, and I can't forgive him — though I feel so intensely grateful to him for just being alive that I could never, never do him an ill turn."

"It was his own fault," said Terry, love and anger struggling in his eyes, "to dare to suspect you — and I was a brute, too, to sneak in like that, knowing how nervous you were, and only got my deserts. And — and you didn't fall in love with Laurent?" he added, taking her little face between his two thin hands and looking through and through her.

"What do *you* think, sir?" said Noemie saucily. "Certainly I had every inducement to do so!"

"And was *he* as much as ever in love with you?" said Terry steadily. "You're blushing, now — you can't deny it."

"When men openly desert their wives," — began Noemie.

"He is a splendid fellow," said Terry, setting his wife down, and walking to the window; "he has been searching for me everywhere, and only left off looking when he heard I was here. I had a letter from him — written in the best possible spirit — both to me and — you."

"Yes," said Noemie, with far-away eyes, "I never knew half his goodness until — lately."

"And the contrast between us as men is very striking," said Terry, in a flat, dull voice.

"Yes," said Noemie slowly. "I have often compared you in my mind with him — unfavorably."

"And I deserve it," said Terry, looking a weary and a broken-hearted man.

"Only," said Noemie, stealing up behind him, "I — like — you — best."

THE

NOTORIOUS MISS ANSTRUTHER

BY

E. W. HORNUNG

THE NOTORIOUS MISS ANSTRUTHER.

It is prejudicial to the nicest girl in this unjust world to be asked in marriage too frequently. Things come out, and she gets the name of being a heartless flirt; her own sex add that she cannot be a very nice girl. A flirt she is, of a surety; but why heartless, and why not a nice girl? So grave defects do not follow. The flirt who doesn't think she is one — the flirt with a set of sham principles and ideals, and a misleading veneer of soul — is heartless, if you like, and something worse. Now, the girl who gets herself proposed to regularly once a week in the season is far less contemptible; she is not contemptible at all,

for how could she know that you meant so much more than she did? She only knows a little too much to take your word for this.

A sweetly pretty and highly accomplished young girl, little Miss Anstruther came to know too much to dream of taking any man's word on this point. She was reputed to have refused more offers than a good girl ought to get; for what in the very beginning conferred a certain distinction upon her, made her notorious at a regretably early stage of her career. The finger of feminine disapproval pointed at her presently in an unmistakable way; and this is said — by women — to be a very bad sign. Men may not think so. Intensely particular ladies, in the pride of their complete respectability, tried to impress upon very young men in whom they were interested that Miss Anstruther was not at all a nice girl. But this had a disappointing effect upon the boys. And Miss Anstruther by

no means confined herself to rejecting mere boys.

The moths that singed themselves at this flame were of every variety. They would have made a rare collection under glass, with pins through them. Miss Anstruther herself would have inspected them thus with the liveliest interest. Her detractors also could have enjoyed themselves at such an exhibition. But the more generous spirits among them — those who had been young and attractive too long ago to pretend to be either still — might have found there some slight excuse for Miss Anstruther. Of course, it was no excuse at all; but it was notable that almost every moth had some salient good point — something to "account for it" on *her* side, to some extent — say a twentieth part of the extent to which she had gone. Nearly all the moths had *something* to be said for them — looks, intellect, a nice voice, an operatic mustache, c-

an aptitude for the informal recitation of engaging verses; their strong points, sorted out and fitted together, would have made a dazzling being—whom Miss Anstruther would have rejected as firmly and as finally as she had rejected his integral parts.

For there was no pleasing the girl. Apparently she did not mean to be pleased—in that way. She had neither wishes nor intentions, it became evident, beyond immediate flirtation of the most wilful description. Her depravity was shocking.

Her accomplishment was singing. She sang divinely. Also she had plenty of money; but the money alone was not at the bottom of many declarations; her voice was the more infatuating element of the two; and her "way" did more damage than either. She was not, indeed, aware what a "way" she had with her. It was a way of seeming desperately smitten, and a little unhappy about

it; which is quite sufficient to make a man of tender years or acute conscientiousness "speak" on the spot. Thus many a proposal was as unexpected on her part as it was unpremeditated on his. He made a sudden fool of himself—heard some surprisingly sensible things from her frivolous lips—decided, upon reflection and inquiry, that these were her formula—and got over the whole thing in the most masterly fashion. This is where Miss Anstruther was so much more wholesome than the flirt who doesn't think she flirts: Miss Anstruther never rankled.

She had no mother to check her notorious propensity in its infancy, and no brother to bully her out of it in the end. Her father, an Honorable, but a man of intrinsic distinction as well, was queer enough to see no fault in her; but he was a busy man. She had, however, a kinsman, Lord Nunthorp, who used to talk to her like a brother on the subject of

her behavior, only a little less heavily than brothers use. Nunthorp knew what he was talking about. He had once played at being in love with her himself. But that was in the days when his mustache looked as though he had forgotten to wash it off, and before Miss Anstruther came out. There had been no nonsense between them for years. They were the best and most intimate of friends.

"Another!" he would say, gazing gravely upon her as the most fascinating curiosity in the world, when she happened to be telling him about the very latest. "Let's see—*how* many's that?"

There came a day when she told Nunthorp she had lost count; and she really had. The day was at the fag-end of one season. He had been lunching at the Anstruthers', and Miss Anstruther had been singing to him.

"I'm afraid I can't assist you," said he

with amused concern. "I only remember the first eleven, so to speak. First man in was your rector's son in the country, young Miller, who was sent out to Australia on the spot. He *was* the first, wasn't he? Yes; I thought that was the order; and, by Jove, Midge, how fond you were of that boy!"

"I was," said Miss Anstruther, glancing out of the window with a wistful look in her pretty eyes; but her kinsman said to himself that he remembered that wistful look—it went cheap.

"The next man in," said Nunthorp, who was an immense cricketer, "was *me!*"

"I like that!" said Miss Anstruther, taking her eyes from the window with rather a jerk, and smiling brightly. "You've left out Cousin Dick!"

"So I have. I beg Dick's pardon. It was very egotistical of me, but pardonable, for of course Dick never stood so high in the serene

favor as I did. I came after Dick then, first wicket down, and since then — well, you say yourself that you've lost tally, but you must have bowled out a pretty numerous team by this time. My dear Midge," said Nunthorp, with a sudden access of paternal gravity, "don't you think it about time that somebody came in and carried his bat?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Miss Anstruther briskly. She added, almost miserably, "I wish to goodness they wouldn't ask me! If only they wouldn't propose, I should be all right. Why do they want to go and propose? It spoils everything."

Her tone and look were quite injured. She was more indignant than Nunthorp had ever seen her — except once — for the girl was of a most serene disposition. He looked at her kindly and as admiringly as ever, though rather with the eye of a connoisseur; and he found she had still the most lovely, perfect,

uncommon, and fragrant little face he had ever seen in his life. He said candidly, —

"I really don't blame them, and I don't see how you can. If you are to blame anybody, I'm afraid it must be yourself. You must give them some encouragement, Midge, or I don't think they'd all come to the point as they do. I never saw such sportsmen as they are! They walk in and walk out again one after the other, and they seem to like it —"

"I wish they did!" said Miss Anstruther devoutly. "I only wish they'd show *me* that they liked it. I should have a better time then. They wouldn't keep making me miserable with their idiotic farewell letters. That's what they *all* do. Either they write and call me everything — rudely, politely, sarcastically, all ways — or they say their hearts are broken, and they haven't the faintest intention of getting over it — in fact, they

wouldn't get over it if they could. That's enough to make any person feel low, even if you know from experience what to expect. At one time I daren't look in the paper for fear of seeing their suicides; but I've only seen their weddings. They all seem to get over it pretty easily; and that doesn't make you think much better of yourself, you know. Of course I'm inconsistent!"

"Of course you are," said Nunthorp cordially. "I approve of you for it. I'd rather see you an old maid, Midge, than going through life in a groove. Consistency's a narrow groove for narrow minds! I can do better than this about consistency, Midge. I'm hot and strong on the subject. But you're not listening."

"Ah!" cried Miss Anstruther, who had not listened to a word, "they're driving me crazy, between them! There's Mr. Willimott, you know, who writes. Of course he had no busi-

ness to speak to me. There were a hundred things against him at the time — even if I'd cared for him — though he's getting more successful now. Well, I do believe he's put me into every story he's written since it happened! I crop up in some magazine or other every month!"

"'Into work the poet kneads them,'" murmured Nunthorp, who was not a professional cricketer. "Well, you needn't bother yourself about *him*. You've made the fellow. He now draws a heroine better than most men. It's a pity you don't take to writing, Midge; you'd draw your heroes better than women do as a rule; for don't you see that you must know more about us than we know about ourselves?"

"They wouldn't be much of heroes!" laughed the girl. "But I heartily wish I *did* write. Wouldn't I show up some people, that's all! It would give me something to

do, too; it would keep me out of mischief, and, really, I'm sick of men and their ridiculous nonsense. And they all say the same thing. If only they wouldn't say anything at all! Why do they? You might tell me!"

Nunthorp put on his thinking-cap. "You see, you are quite pretty," said he.

"Thanks."

"Then you sing like an angel."

"Please don't! That's what *they* all say."

"Ah, the singing has a lot to do with it. You oughtn't to sing so well. You should cultivate less expression. And then — I'm afraid you like attention."

"Well, perhaps I do."

"And I'm sure it must be very hard *not* to be attentive to you," said Nunthorp, with a rather brutal impersonality; "for I should fancy you have a way — quite unconscious, mind — of giving your current admirer the

idea that he's the only one who ever held the office!"

"Thanks," said she with perfect good humor; "that's a very pretty way of putting it."

"What, Midge?"

"That I'm a hopeless flirt — which is the root of the whole matter, I suppose!"

She burst out laughing, and he joined her. But there had been a pinch of pathos in her words, and he was weak enough to make a show of contradicting them. She would not listen to him; she laughed at his insincerity. The conversation had broken down, and as soon as he decently could, he went.

That was at the very end of a season; and Lord Nunthorp did not see his notorious relative again for some months. In the following February, however, he heard her sing at some evening party. He had no chance of talking with her properly; but he was glad

to find that he could meet her at a dance the next night.

"Well, Midge," he was able to say at last, as they sat out together at this dance, "how many proposals since the summer?"

She gravely held up three fingers. Nunthorp laughed consumedly.

"Any more scalps?" he inquired.

This was an ancient pleasantry. It referred to the expensive presents with which some young men had paved their way to disappointment. It was a moot point between Miss Anstruther and her noble kinsman whether she had any right to retain these things. She considered she had every right, and declared that these presents were her only compensation for so many unpleasantnesses. He pretended to take higher ground in the matter. But it amused him a good deal to ask about her "scalps."

She told him what the new ones were.

"And I perceive *mine* — upon your wrist!" Nunthorp exclaimed, examining her bracelet; and he was genuinely tickled.

"Well!" said she, turning to him with the frankest eyes, "I'd quite forgotten *whose* it was — honestly, I had!"

He was vastly amused. So his bracelet — she had absolutely forgotten that it was his — did not make her feel at all awkward. There was a healthy cynicism in the existing relations between these two.

She had nothing very new to tell him. Two out of the last three had proposed by letter. She confessed to being sick and tired of answering this kind of letter.

"I'll tell you what," said her kinsman, looking inspired, "you ought to have one printed! You could compose a very pretty one, with blanks for the name and date. It would save you a deal of time and trouble. You would have it printed in brown ink and

rummy old type, don't you know, on rough paper with coarse edges. It would look charming. 'Dear Mr. Blank, of course I'm greatly flattered' — no, you'd say 'very' — 'of course I'm very flattered by your letter, but I must confess it astonished me. I thought we were to be such *friends*.' Really, Midge, it would be well worth your while!"

Miss Anstruther did not dislike the joke, from him; but when he added, "The pity is you didn't start it in the very beginning, with young Ted Miller —" she checked him instantly.

"Now, don't you speak about *him*," she said, in a firm, quiet little way; but he appreciated the look that swept into her soft eyes no better than he had appreciated it six months before.

"Why not?" asked Nunthorp, merely amused.

"Because *he meant* it!"

Nunthorp wondered, but not seriously, whether that young fellow who had gone in first was to be the one, after all, to carry out his bat. And this way of putting it, in his own head, which was half full of cricket, carried him back to their last chat, and reminded him of a thing he had wanted to say to her for the last twenty-four hours.

"Do you remember my telling you," said he, "when I last had the privilege of lecturing you, that you sang iniquitously well? Then I feel it a duty to tell you that your singing is now worse than ever—in this respect. No wonder you have had three fresh troubles. I consider it very little, with your style of singing. Your songs have much to answer for. I said so then, I can swear to it now. Your voice is heavenly, of course; but why pronounce your words so distinctly? I'm sure it isn't at all fashionable. And why strive to make sense of your

sounds? I really don't think it's good form to do so. And it's distinctly dangerous. It didn't happen to matter last night, because the rooms were so crowded; but if you sing to one or two as you sing to one or two hundred, I don't wonder at them, I really don't. You sing as if you meant every word of the drivel — I believe you humbug yourself into *half* meaning it, while you're singing!"

"I believe I do," Miss Anstruther replied, with characteristic candor. "You've no idea how much better it makes you sing, to put a little heart into it. But I never thought of this: perhaps I had better give up singing!"

"I'll tell you, when my turn comes round again," said he, leading her back to the ballroom. "I'll think of nothing else meanwhile."

He did not dance; he was not a dancing man; but he did think of something else

meanwhile. He thought of a young fellow with a pale face, darkly accoutred, with whom Miss Anstruther seemed to be dancing a great deal. Lord Nunthorp hated dancing, and he had only come here to sit out a couple of dances with his amusing relative. He had to wait a good time between them; he spent it in watching her; and *she* spent it in dancing with the pale, dark boy — all but one waltz, during which Nunthorp removed his attention from the bow to its latest string, who, for the time being, looked miserable.

"Who," he asked her, as they managed to get possession of their former corner in the conservatory, "is your dark-haired, pale-faced friend?"

"Well," whispered Miss Anstruther, with grave concern, "I'm very much afraid that he is what *you* would call the next man in!"

"Good heaven!" ejaculated Nunthorp, for

once aghast. "Do you mean to say he is going to propose to you?"

"I feel it coming; I know the symptoms only too well," she replied, in cold blood.

"Then perhaps you're going to make a different answer at last?"

"My *dear* man!" said Lord Nunthorp's sisterly little connection; and her tone was that of a person rather cruelly misjudged.

The noble kinsman held his tongue for several seconds. Man of the world as he was, he looked utterly scandalized. Here, in this fair, frail, beautiful form, lay a depth of cynicism which he could not equal personally — which he could not fathom in another, and that other a quite young girl.

"Midge," he said at last with sincere solemnity, "you horrify me! You've often told me this kind of thing, but this is the first time I've seen you with a fly actually in the web: for I don't think I myself counted,

after all. That boy is helplessly in love with you! And you were smiling upon him as though you liked him too!"

Nunthorp was touched tremulously upon the arm. "Was I?" the girl asked him in a frightened voice. "*Was* I looking — like that?"

"I think you were," said Nunthorp frankly. "And now you calmly scoff at the bare notion of accepting him! You make my blood run cold, Midge! I think you can have no heart!"

"Do you think that?" she asked, strenuously, as though he had struck her.

"No, no; you know I don't; only after seeing you look at him like that —"

"Honestly, I didn't know I was looking in any particular way." Miss Anstruther added in a lowered, softened voice, "If I was — well, it wasn't meant for *him*."

Lord Nunthorp dropped his eyeglass.

"And it wasn't meant for *you*, either!" she superadded, smartly enough

Lord Nunthorp breathed again, and ventured to recommend an immediate snub in the pale boy's case.

When he had led her back to her chaperon, he felt easier on her account than he had been for a long time. It was obvious to him that the biter was bit at last. The right man was evidently in view, though he was not there at the dance — which was hard on the white-faced youth. Perhaps she was not the right girl for the right man — perhaps he refused to be attracted by her. That would be odd, but not impossible; and a girl who had refused to fall in love with every man who had ever fallen in love with her was the likeliest girl in the world to care for some man who cared nothing for her — primarily to *make* him care. That is a woman, through and through, reflected Lord Nunthorp, out of

the recesses of a *recherché* experience. But Midge would most certainly make him care; she was fascinating enough to capture any man — except himself — if she seriously tried; and he sincerely hoped she was going to try, to succeed, and to live happily ever after. For Nunthorp had now quite a paternal affection for the girl, and he wished her well, from the depths of his man-of-the-world's prematurely gray heart. But he did not like a little scene, with her in it, which he witnessed just before he quitted that party.

"My dance!" said a boy's confident, excited voice, just behind him; and the voice of Miss Anstruther replied, in the coldest of tones, that he "must have made a mistake, for it was not his dance at all."

"But I've got it down," the boy pleaded, as yet only amazed. His face was like marble as Nunthorp watched him. Miss Anstruther was also slightly pale.

"She's doing her duty for once," thought Nunthorp, to whom the pathos of the incident lay in its utter conventionality. "But she plays a cruel game!"

"You've got it down?" said Miss Anstruther, very clearly, examining her card with ostentatious care. "Excuse me, but there is really some mistake; *I* haven't got *your* name down for *anything* else!"

For an instant Nunthorp held himself in readiness for a scene: he half-expected to see the boy, whose white face was now on fire, snatch the card from her, expose her infamy, tear up the card, and throw the pieces in her face. His face looked like it for a single instant, and Nunthorp was prepared to protect him if he did it. But the boy went away without a word.

Nunthorp met the girl's eyes with his. He knew she was looking for his approval: he knew she had earned it, by preventing one

poor fellow from going the whole humbling length, and he was glad to think that she had taken his advice; but the glance he gave her was very grim. He could not help it. He went away feeling quite unlike himself.

Just outside, in the street, some one brushed past him, sobbing an oath. And Lord Nunthorp became himself again; for the person was Miss Anstruther's last victim.

"*That's* all right," he muttered; "not a broken heart — only broken pride. That's all that's breakable, after all, and it will mend!" He walked home rather pleased with Midge, as he called her, for having done her duty, no matter how late, in at least *one* case. He was vexed with himself for having been stupid about it at the moment. But it delighted him to think that most likely this would be the last case — of the kind. For Lord Nunthorp took always the most good-natured interest in his conspicuous cousin (or

whatever she was), with whom he had once played at love himself.

How plain it was to the world that Miss Anstruther was motherless! No mother would have allowed her to behave as she did. With a mother, she would have married one of the many, whether she loved him or not. Her father, whose time was much taken up, was so blind as to see no harm in her. The only people she had to remonstrate with her were her married sisters. One of these had been Miss Anstruther's chaperon at this dance, where she sat out twice with her kinsman, Lord Nunthorp, and broke a silly youth's pride. This sister ventured to remonstrate — but very gently — when they got home, in the small hours of the February morning.

Miss Anstruther had been silent and subdued during the drive home. She was considerably ashamed of herself. She was more

ashamed of having ill-treated the white-faced boy over that dance — now that it was done — than she would have been to reject him after encouragement. Use had blunted her feelings to this sort of sin; but the wrong of breaking, cold-bloodedly, an engagement to dance was altogether out of harmony with her character and her practices. She was notorious for leading men on to certain humiliation. She was celebrated for the punctilio with which she kept her word in the smallest matter. She had injured the good reputation in snapping the backbone of the bad one; and she did not feel at all pleased with Lord Nunthorp, who had said or implied one thing, and then stared its opposite. She had cheered up, however, on her arrival at the house: she had found a letter for herself, with three bright blue stamps in the corner, stuck up on the mantel-piece. Her hand had closed eagerly over this letter before the lamp

was turned up. She was twisting it between her fingers, under her shawl, while her sister reproved her, not too seriously, for her treatment of that boy.

"I know it," she answered, rather dolefully; "I know well enough what a flirt I am! I have never denied it in my life, not even to *them*. But I really never mean them to go so far. And — and I don't think I'm so heartless as I make myself out to be!"

Her sister gazed at her fondly. Her own family, at all events, loved and believed in Miss Anstruther, and held that her faults were on the surface. The sister now saw in the sweet, flushed face the look that Lord Nunthorp had seen (and underestimated) more than once.

"Is there some one you care for, after all, Midge dear?" she asked softly.

"There may have been some one all the time," the young girl whispered, her eyelids

fallen, her hand squeezing the letter under her shawl.

"Is it — is it Ted Miller?"

Midge looked up into her sister's eyes. Her lip was quivering. She was a girl who seldom cried — her detractors would have told you why. She controlled herself before speaking now.

"It was the most hopeless affair of them all," she said simply; "but — but he was the only one who really meant it!"

His letter was against her bosom.

The married sister's eyes had filled. "You write to each other still, don't you, Midge?"

"Yes — as friends. Good-night, Helen!"

"Good-night, darling Midge. Forgive me for speaking," Helen whispered, kissing her eyes.

"Forgive you? You've said nothing to what I deserve!"

The girl was running up to her room, two

steps at a time. Ted Miller's letter was pressed tight to her heart.

Ted Miller had been four years in Australia. He had written to her regularly the whole time, as her friend; and she had written fairly regularly to him, as his. His was the one refusal in which she had not been a free agent. She had been but seventeen at the time. There was love between them when they parted; there was never a word of it in their letters. He wrote and told her all that he was doing: he was roughing it in the wilderness; he was not making his fortune: he never spoke of coming home. She wrote and told him — nearly all.

A pleasant fire was burning in her room. She lit the candles, and sat down just as she was, in her very extravagant ball-dress, to read his present letter. She felt, as always in opening a letter from Ted, that she was going to open a window and let in a cool cur-

rent of fragrant, fresh air upon an unhealthy, heavy atmosphere; and she noticed, what she had not noticed before, through hiding the letter before the lamp was turned up, that its superscription was not in Ted's hand; the bright blue stamps of New South Wales were really all she had looked at before. She now tore open the envelope with strange misgivings: and the letter turned out to be from the squatter's wife on Ted Miller's station, telling how a buck-jumper had broken Ted Miller's back; and how, before his death, which ensued in a matter of hours, he had directed her to write to his family, and also — but separately — to "his greatest friend."

The fire dulled down, the candles shortened, and in their light Miss Anstruther sat in her dazzling ball-dress, her face as gray as its satin sheen. Her rounded arms were more florid than her face. She moaned a little to herself — she could not cry.

At last she stirred herself. Her limbs were stiff. As she crossed the room, she saw herself from head to foot in her pier-glass — with all her grace of form and motion dead and stiff within her dress. She saw herself thus, but at the time with senseless eyes; the sight first came back to her when she next used that mirror. She was going to a certain drawer; she unlocked it, and drew it out bodily; she carried it to the table where the candles were slowly burning down. The drawer was filled with Miller's letters.

"His greatest friend!" They had been merely friends from the day they parted. He had nothing. Out there he had found fortune but a little less inaccessible than at home; he had written her no words of love, for how could there be any hope for them? She had plenty of money, but that was all the more reason why he must have some.

's letters were not vulgarized by a single

passionate, or sentimental, or high-flown passage. They were the letters of an honest friend; they were the letters of a good soldier — on the losing side, but fighting, not talking about fighting — talking, indeed, of quite other matters. And because these letters had been just what they were, Ted Miller himself had been to a frivolous girl, through frivolous years, what no one else had ever been — not even himself as she had known him best. Their friendship had been pure and strong and strengthening; their love idealized by improbability, and further by not being discussed, and yet further by being written "friendship." His tone to her had been: "Enjoy yourself. I want to hear you're having a good time. *I* am — there's nothing like work." She had answered, very truthfully, that she was doing so; and now he knew how! That was the bitterest thought: that the new knowledge was now his, and

she, in his eyes, just what she had been in the eyes of the throng!

She sat down and read all his letters. The pure breath of heaven rose from every leaf. They did not touch her yet: her heart was numb. But the tones that had once come to her ears from every written word came no longer — the voice was silenced. She returned the letters to the drawer. She would keep them till her death.

And yet — would he like that?

She sat very still, trying to answer this question. The candles went out, but a leaden light had crept into the room through the blinds. She thought that he saw her, that he had seen her for weeks, that she had been grieving him the whole time, that she might please him now. There had been nothing morbid in Miller. He was the one man she had known who would wish her *not* to keep his letters.

She rose resolutely from her chair, and with difficulty rekindled her fire; it ruined her elaborate dress, but she was glad never to wear this one again. It did not seem to her that she was about to do anything cruel or unnatural. She was going to do violence to her own feelings only. It would please the strong soul of Miller that she was not going to keep his letters, to read them in her better moods, and less and less as the years went on. For her own part, she felt she would like to have them a little longer. It was a subtle sense of sacrifice for Miller's sake — her first — which nerved her to burn his letters. Overstrung as she was, she burnt them every one, and without a tear.

A half-leaf happened to escape. She picked it out of the fender when the rest were burnt black, and her heart was beginning to ache for what she had done. She took it to the window, and read on the crisp,

scorched paper the ordinary end of an ordinary letter — the end of all was, as ever, — "Yours always, E. M."

Without a moment's warning, her tears rattled upon the hot paper; she pressed it passionately to her lips; she flung herself upon the bed in a paroxysm of helpless agony.